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Making A New Beginning: Biblical Reflections On Jubilee

Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initative

Sara Stratton

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This collection of reflections has been compiled by the Theology Committee of the *Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative*. The contributions are diverse, reflecting: concerns with different biblical texts and threads of the stories behind them; sensibilities and hermeneutics of different denominations and other theological differences; experiences with different social movements; and the preoccupations of scholars in longer articles and of preachers in shorter reflections and sermons. But the contributors are united in their commitment to Jubilee concerns for release from debt and other forms of slavery, redistribution of wealth, and rest for the earth, to support for campaigns addressing these issues, and to the renewal of theology and the whole life of the church in this Spirit.

The core Theology Committee combines professors and students, activists, pastors and academics living and working in Toronto. For two years we have been meeting to engage in biblical and theological reflection on Jubilee and to support the work of the *Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative*. Most of the reflections in this collection emerged from these efforts; they are supplemented by reflections and sermons from friends and colleagues in the growing global web of hope for a new beginning. We have also been collaborating with others across Canada, in Latin America, Africa and Asia, in Europe and the United States. We hope that this collection reflects the spirit of this emergent global dialogue, solidarity and collaboration, which seeks to incorporate especially the voices of historically marginalized peoples and groups, and those speaking on behalf of peace and of the earth.

We hope this publication will assist individuals, groups and church communities in deepening their understanding of the biblical roots of Jubilee , the centrality of the Spirit of Jubilee in the Bible, and the urgency of rediscovering this Spirit today. In this form, these contributions reflect only the views of the authors, and not of their organizations or the organizations supporting the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative. And they are limited in many ways. But, we firmly believe, we are only at an early stage in emerging global dialogue. Most of all we hope that this collection testifies to the Spirit of these dialogues. We hope that it inspires—or provokes—-many other responses and other contributions. And we look forward to the next stage of dialogue, with a wider range of contributors, greater depth in addressing specific issues, and broader scope.

To order copies of this book or other Jubilee materials contact:
Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative
P.O. Box 772, Station F
Toronto, ON, Canada M4Y 2N6
E-mail: jubilee@devp.org
Website: www.web.net/~jubilee

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Introduction
A New Beginning: A Call to Jubilee

Sara Stratton

The year 2000 is coming, and it is everywhere. Businesses and ventures with the prefix "millennium" or the suffix "2000" are on every corner, we are warned that everything from corporate computers to our automatic coffee makers are going to crash because of the "millennium bug," and people are thinking about how they want to spend the last New Year's Eve of the twentieth century. We are full of hope, and we are full of fear. We've been trained to think that this date has a profound significance, but if pressed, we probably could not explain what it is.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition there exists the notion of Jubilee. Perhaps this is where we should turn if we want to understand the significance of 2000. We are told about Jubilee in Leviticus 25, which says that every fifty years "you shall have the trumpet sounded loud throughout all the land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants." Debts will be forgiven, those in bondage will be freed, wealth will be redistributed, and the earth will be given rest. It is to be a time of a just society. In Luke 4, we read of Jesus proclaiming such a time, a time of Jubilee, when he stood up and read from Isaiah in the temple, declaring that he had come to make real the year of the Lord's favour.

There is now a broad-based church movement afoot to proclaim Jubilee in the time left before 2000. More than 25 Canadian church partners (denominations, ecumenical coalitions, and other organizations) have joined together in the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative. We are called on to "join together and proclaim a vision of hope" and "sound the strongest call for social justice that has ever been heard." We believe that by proclaiming the Biblical vision of Jubilee, we will strengthen the will and the ability of Canadian Christians to work for social and ecological justice through release from bondage (including the bondage of indebtedness), redistribution of wealth, and renewal of the earth.

Jubilee is a profound and rewarding idea, but when I speak about it, many people, Christian and not, tell me that there is no reason to believe that it ever took place. Some go further, implying that we are pursuing an ancient, naive, and impossible solution to the very real problems of debt, unfree labour, poverty, and ecological devastation which face us today.

I reject this argument, and take heart in the work of Maria Harris, a theologian who has convinced me that Jubilee is a possibility. She writes that whether or not it ever happened is irrelevant; what is important is that the liberating ideal of Jubilee exists. It is up to us to make a Jubilee in our time. It is up to us to take the principles of Jubilee to heart and to become a Jubilee people. If we choose this path, then we will honour the Sabbath not only as a time of rest but as a time of work for restorative justice, we will act in a just manner towards our neighbours, and we will seek to be in shalom—in right relation—with the whole inhabited world. We will do this as individuals, as parishes and pastoral charges, and as a society. We will do this because as the creed of my faith says, "we are called to be the church," and we are called to "seek justice." We are called to be a Jubilee people.

Sara Stratton is Program Coordinator at the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada. This article first appeared in the Council's newsletter, The Wick, 26:1 (Spring 1998), and appears here with permission.

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Jubilee and The Reign of God

Lee Cormie

Introduction: "End Times" and "New Beginnings"

The notions of the "end of the millennium" and/or "dawn of the millennium" challenge us to expand our horizons globally and to think in broad historical terms, about the end of one age, and the crises—dangers and possibilities—associated with the transition to a new age. This end-of-the-20th-century transition in the social construction of time indeed coincides with a series of truly epochal changes transforming the foundations, contours and dynamics of life on earth and in the heavens above. And these transitions are triggering multiple crises in the old orders of creation, both natural and social (cultural and religious, social and economic, ethical and political). Ours is a time of great turmoil, millennial—even apocalyptic—fears, alongside seemingly unlimited hopes for improving the quality of life on earth, and wildly divergent faiths.

This passage has heightened significance for Christians. The birth of Christ has for us historic—even cosmic—significance. And in subsequent centuries, as Christians wrestled with the complex problems of ordering time, this event was made central, initially with the adaptation of the Julian calendar by Dionysius Exiguus (Dennis the Short) in the 6th century. And the magic of base-ten numbering system seemingly privileging the years ending in 0's—although unlike days, months and years, decades, centuries and millennia correspond to no natural cycles or phases—and apocalyptic expectations concerning the second coming of Christ and the subsequent 1000 year reign of peace (Rev. 20:4-6) combined to invest apparent turning points at the end of centuries and millennia with "millennial" significance. As the influence of this calendar spread throughout the world with other features of Western economy, culture, and religion, so did the sense of "end times" and "new beginnings." At the end of the 20th century, while many Christians have reservations about imposing this Western religious construction of time on those of other traditions, this period associated with the transition from the 2nd to the 3rd millennium is widely being invested with a sense of millennial hope and/or apocalyptic dread.

For many this heightened sense of hope and dread is not associated so much with the calendar as with a deepening sense in recent years of great suffering in the world and desperate hope for a new beginning. And in ecumenical Christian circles in Canada and around the world the biblical image of "jubilee" resonates increasingly widely as a focal point for discerning the meaning of this time, clarifying the magnitude of the opportunities and challenges before us, setting priorities, and drafting courses of action. In particular, after decades of conflict over growing gaps in incomes and wealth between North and South, starting the new millennium with a jubilee canceling the debt of the most indebted nations of the South promises a significant new beginning. And many outside the churches as well as inside are developing campaigns to educate people generally and to persuade and pressure those in centres of power, in governments and international financial institutions like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to do so.

This campaign is important, helping to incarnate the Spirit of Jubilee at this historical moment. And it has been adopted by the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative (CEJI) as the priority campaign. However, many are concerned at limiting our concerns to debt relief for the most impoverished, as important at this is. We are convinced that: (i) debt is as much a symptom as a cause, and the causes too must be addressed; (ii) the ongoing production of indebtedness reflects deeper tendencies in the (re)structuring of the global economy as a whole, which are adversely affecting the majorities both in poor and developing countries and in rich countries like Canada (high levels of unemployment and underemployment; stagnating or declining wages; increasing job insecurity, and turmoil in families and communities; down-loading and cutting of government services; crisis of democratic participation; etc.); and (iii) these developments are linked to "other" critical issues (from direction and control over genetic engineering and other new technologies, to continuing global arms sales seeding future conflicts, and linked ecological crises) which must be identified and addressed.

The response in the CEJI has been to situate debt relief within the broader jubilee vision of "release from bondage," and to highlight the two other dimensions of biblical Jubilee: redistribution of wealth; and renewal of the earth. This has permitted a broader approach to the end of millennium challenges, and linkages with other campaigns. But there is continuing unease: (i) "jubilee" is referred to only a few times, and is not a focal point or central theme in the bible as a whole; (ii) it has been difficult to "shoe horn" contemporary concerns into biblical categories reflecting a world with ideologies, institutions and structures so different from ours; and (iii) "jubilee" does not so obviously address theology and call the church to repentance, conversion and renewal, and there is a strong sense, as Pope John Paul II insists in his *Tertio Mellennio Adveniente* (*As the Third Millennium Draws Near*, 1994), that these must be central.

In the Jubilee/Theology group we have responded in two ways: (i) insisting that the spirit of jubilee permeates the bible, including the Christian scriptures, even if there are few specific references; (ii) looking for other "overarching" biblical images/themes, more widely cited in the bible, which reflect our concerns and hopes. The following notes suggest deepening and expanding our reflections by setting the "jubilee" proclamation in the context of broader currents of Israelite history and theological development, specifically around the notion of the kingdom or reign of God.

1) Yahweh as King

The liberation struggles of oppressed and exploited peoples in recent decades, along with developments in historiography and hermeneutics, profoundly challenged conventional understandings of history, and the writing of history. As we have wrestled with these challenges, we have brought new questions and insights to the bible, we have learned to see—again!—hope and faith at the centre of history. This renewed experience of hope and faith at the center of history has gradually been finding expression in scholarly exegesis, where it is being refined and developed in exciting new ways. And these developments enable us to see more clearly the great issues of hope and faith at the heart of contemporary debates about

globalization and the future of the world, and the continuing—even deepening—relevance of biblical insights to them.

Some of the most convincing biblical scholarship of the last two decades sketches the origins of Israel as growing out of a movement bringing together a "Moses group" of slaves fleeing from Egypt and various Canaanite underclass groups, who together revolted against the Egyptian empire and its Canaanite city-states rulers.[1] Together, they established a tribal federation of rough equality in the hill country of Israel. In this reading of the texts, "Yahweh" was the mysterious power which drew and held this motley crew together amidst their own internal differences and the conflicting interests of different families, clans and tribes, inspiring and strengthening them, and enabling them to triumph against the mightiest empire of their time. The image of "Yahweh" was the symbolic expression of this coalition's concrete hope for deliverance/liberation.

Of course, these Hebrews drew on existing Near Eastern religious imagery and doctrines in articulating their understanding of God. And their images of Yahweh reflected their neighbours' in at least six ways: (i) the high God is individuated and elevated above others; (ii) the high God is active in the world; (iii) the high God is conceived in terms of natural and human analogies; (iv) the high God is powerful, just, and merciful; (v) the high God has a bond with a particular people or region; and (vi) the high God is interpreted by human representatives.[2] These features of religious belief were common in the ancient Near East.

However, their emerging conception of their God also differed in at least three important ways, with important consequences for the life of faith: (i) for the Israelites Yahweh is the sole high God usurping the entire sacred domain (even before the development of a doctrine of monotheism); (ii) this sole high God is alone active in the world, in contrast to polytheism, fostering a tighter coherence between belief and action, in both doctrine and practice; and (iii) the sole high God is conceived especially in terms of egalitarian sociopolitical images, more rarely with animals or other features of nature).[3]

Israelite religion concerned the emergence of the hopes and commitments of the various components of what came to be the Israelite confederation of tribes, and their faith in a different possibility in history in spite of the enormous power of the Pharaoh and his allies in the Canaanite city states. It symbolized and expressed the commitment to solidarity and the

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[1] Norman Gottwald led the way in re-conceptualizing Israelite origins in these terms; Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250 - 1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979); for an excellent overall introduction to the Hebrew bible in this spirit, cf. Anthony Ceresko, *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

[2] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250 - 1050 B.C.E.*, 676-78.

[3] Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh* 679-91.

"common good" in spite of the endless sources of disagreement and conflict among the members of this motley alliance in a continually shifting and intensely conflictual environment.

In theological terms, we can say that Yahweh was revealed in the course of these struggles, as the God concerned above all with the oppressed, who promised their liberation in spite of all obstacles. Liberated Israel was an expression of God's will. God's will found expression in history especially/uniquely in Israel. Israelite "faith" was an irreducible element of this historical project, incarnating the spirit of equality and justice in a movement of peoples which transformed history. And idolatry was expressed concretely in taking for granted, or blessing as god-given, inequality, injustice, and inhospitality to outsiders, and in denial of the hope for liberation of exploited and oppressed peoples.

2) Challenges of Historical Change

This experience and articulation of faith clearly infused subsequent generations of Hebrews, and the development of the traditions and the texts which were finally gathered in the Bible. It remained a central nexus of faith, and continues to do so today in the Jewish and Christian traditions. But ancient Israelite history did not stand still, nor did Israelite faith. And, as we have learned from experiences of struggle in our own time, there are many ways in which changing circumstances challenge specific historical expressions of hope and faith, and provoke renewal.

In the ancient Near East technological developments—the development of lined cisterns facilitating the storage of water, the use iron in making farm implements and weapons like chariots, the invention of the alphabet facilitating writing, new accounting techniques—significantly transformed the scale and scope for organizing and managing everyday life, evident in both the rise of empires and the resistance to them. Plagues devastated populations, rending the social fabric of whole societies. Changing forms of social order, in response to internal developments and/or to changes imposed by external forces, also transformed the experience of everyday life, of privilege and deprivation, of wealth and poverty, inevitability and possibility, hope and resignation. These and related developments posed anew the most basic questions concerning heaven and earth—the concrete limits of hope for this life on earth, the character of good and evil, the nature of the Creator, the basic logic and ultimate end of creation, the character and scope of human freedom and responsibility.

Concretely in Israelite history, the emergence of the powerful Philistines on the outskirts of Canaan signaled the closure of the social space for their historic experiment in tribal and clan-based egalitarianism. The descendants of the first Hebrews, who risked all in the struggle to create something new against imperial social order centered around the institution of kingship, royal bureaucracies, empire and the city-state vassals, were forced to consider again the "advantages" of centralized rule, a standing army and the taxing capacities to maintain it. And the establishment of the permanent monarchy profoundly changed Israel, and the course of its subsequent development. "The king was the head of the army, and the monarchy was intended

primarily to ensure a united military leadership in defensive warfare. But it became in its turn the decisive factor in the evolution of society."[4]

So, conflicts with the Philistines and with successive empires transformed the contours and dynamics of life in Israel, the people's experience of suffering and evil, grace and goodness. In their subsequent wrestling with Yahweh's promise of liberation they had to wrestle with these new realities, and in particular with the often oppressive reign of their own kings. And more generally, subsequent experiences of royal rule and its various institutional expressions, of the growing weight of their religious traditions and institutions, and of external threats (often conquest) regularly compelled them to think again about hope for this life on earth, and the God who promises it in spite of all obstacles.

3) Kingship and Hope

At their best, these developments strengthened Israelite capacities to resist foreign conquest and enslavement—i.e., the silencing of their voices in the debates over the vision, priorities, policies, institutions and structures characterizing their society; exploitation of their labour for the profit of others; religious and cultural oppression and persecution of "rebels," "dissidents." The stories of Daniel come readily to mind.

And after the development of the monarchy in Israel, in a world of monarchies, it is not surprising that the hope for liberation came to be articulated in terms of a king who would deliver the people from foreign oppressors, as in Isaiah (though a few, like Amos, apparently clung to a more radical vision of egalitarian Israel without a king at all).

At their worst though, Israelite images and doctrines of God as "king" were interpreted to sacralize/bless/baptize the rule of particular earthly kings. With startling rapidity, for example, Solomon and his supporters appealed to royal imagery of the divine to legitimize their efforts to accumulate and centralize power, with all its benefits. Inspired by a different spirit, they "revolutionized" Israel, creating internal hierarchies of privilege and power, exploitation and oppression. And they bent Israelite religion to service as one of the central axes of this new order, legitimating it and them as its functionaries.

The mortal threats from outside were too often real and immediate, demanding "radical" responses. But so often the "enemy" was also, at times primarily, within, in groups which forgot or rejected the deepest truths of their tradition. And Israelite prophecy arose especially in response to these threats, as Israelites wrestled with their own conflicting traditions and institutions in the face of external threats and opportunities, in the midst of the swirling cultural currents of the Mediterranean basin and new developments in technology and institutional forms.

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[4] Willy Schottroff, "The Prophet Amos: A Socio-Historical Assessment of His Ministry," eds. Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible*, Trans. Matthew O'Conell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 38.

The prophets continually called Israelites to renewed vision and commitment in the historical pilgrimage toward the promised land of equality and justice.

And at times the ambiguities and contradictions of history produced some startling outcomes. Jeremiah was driven to interpreting conquest by a foreign empire as the vehicle of Yahweh's deliverance from oppression. What a long way the people had come from simple belief in the immediate possibility of creating a life free from oppression and domination which flowered in the liberation movement in Canaan!"[5]

4) The Divine King Relativizes All Earthly Princes and Regimes

Beyond the particularities of specific episodes in Israelite history, the Israelite experience of God's revelation points to a deeper truth. Beyond the details of particular experiences of Yahweh, or of Yahweh's demands since images of Yahweh were forbidden, the experience of divine kingship continually functioned to relativize every earthly king, exposing him to criticism in light of the divine image of kingship defined by love and justice. This is evident repeatedly in the bible in the prophetic criticisms of particular kings. And debates over interpreting this ideal and how particular kings were to be judged in its light varied greatly, from time to time, context to context, and group to group. There is no doubt, though, that these issues were at the centre of Israelite religion and politics. Sometimes they bitterly divided the community, as they wrestled with each other, and with their changing contexts. But, always, they were central to the debates, and to the theological renewal required by continuing commitment to the hope for liberation in the midst of changing circumstances.

More fundamentally, beyond the pedagogical value of these images and doctrines in nurturing an ideal and beyond their practical value in criticism of particular kings, they opened the door to criticism of the regime of kingship itself. They inspired dreams of another kind of social order, in which equality and justice more naturally flourished. Nourished by memories of the foundational experience of liberated Canaan embedded in Israelite traditions, they inspired dreams of a social order without kings (Amos). And, as they had in inspiring the federation at the origins of Israel, they inspired experiments in alternative institutions and structures promising equality and justice for all, and hospitality to strangers and outsiders.

This is evident above all in the image of jubilee.

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[5] Jürgen Kegler, "The Prophetic Discourse and Political Praxis of Jeremiah: Observations on Jeremiah 26 and 36," eds. Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible*, Trans. Matthew O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 47-56.

5) Jubilee Relativizes Every Ideology, Institution and Structure

The defeat of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple of Solomon, widespread devastation of cities and towns, and forced deportation of nobility and leading citizens by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar marked a definitive turning point in the history of Israel. From the perspective of the Israelites, these defeats and "Babylonian exile" (587-539) marked "the end of political independence for the people of Israel. Henceforth they would not write their own history but became a part of other histories, the histories of the powerful imperial systems that dominated the Ancient Near East."[6] The book of Leviticus, and the Priestly re-working of the other traditions in creating the Pentateuch, reflected this experience of defeat of historical hopes, exile, and dreams of restoration and renewal. In the vacuum left with the defeat of the monarchy, one priestly group in particular, tracing descent from Moses' brother Aaron, emerged as leaders in reinterpreting and reworking Israelite traditions "in such a way as to keep its contact with the past and at the same time build a new foundation for the future."[7] This challenging social project of reconstructing collective identity and recreating the foundations of a new social order severely limited in its status as a dependent state vis-a-vis dominating imperial powers. And hope for the continued existence of the Jewish community and its ever more postponed hope for liberation provoked a re-centering of communal life around the family, community, the eventually restored Temple and its purifying rituals, guided by the priests.[8]

It was impossible to avoid cooperation and collaboration with imperial powers.[9] But, as they reformulated their traditions and plans from exile and in the immediate post-Exilic decades, the people stubbornly continued to dream of sovereignty, equality and justice, and of a restored society incarnating this spirit. This is nowhere clearer than in the jubilee legislation.

There is much debate about whether this legislation was ever practiced. But given the circumstances, this is almost unimaginable. Sometimes hopes and faith are all a people has. And the fact that, after the definitive destruction of their nation, the Jews dreamed of jubilee was enormously important historically in shaping the way they lived with domination, continued to resist and to hope. And it remains so today.

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[6] Ceresko, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 65; cf. also 218.

[7] Ceresko, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 250.

[8] As Gottwald has pointed out, the "fascination with cosmos and chaos should be read as a *stabilizing strategy* in the struggle to preserve Jewish community in the midst of disortienting exile and restoration conditions. Similarly, the passion to differentiate Israel as a distinct people with its own peculiar marks of circumcision, Sabbath, food laws, festivals, and sacrifices is a comprehensive effort to fashion a *self-perpetuating community* that would not be eroded by internal division and uncertainty or by external oppression and persuasion." Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 473.

[9] Ceresko, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 252.

From bitter experience, they recognized the seemingly natural and inevitable tendencies toward inequalities and injustice within their community. They knew how easily these came to be accepted as natural, good, blessed as the expression of God's will. They dreamed of renewal in the Spirit of equality and justice, peace and ecological integrity in the restoration of the post-exilic Jewish community. And, against all the tendencies toward reasserted hierarchies and inequalities, they imagined a mechanism for its regular renewal every fifty years.

"Jubilee" relativizes every ideology, institution, structure, no matter how apparently "natural," "inevitable," "God-given." Anything less is idolatry.

Jubilee is not an idle dream. It inspires each people in each context to critically question every view which takes inequality, conflict and the devastation of the earth for granted, to examine every institution and structure for ways it might contribute to inequality.

And fidelity to the Spirit of jubilee today requires: (i) a renewed vision of the new possibilities in our time of emergent global civilization for witnessing in our institutions and structures to the coming reign of God; (ii) critical questioning of (neoliberal) economic orthodoxy; (iii) the active search and willingness to experiment with new mechanisms for reducing inequalities, expanding participation, resolving conflicts, promoting peace-making, and renewing the earth; and (iv) renewed faith in this good news in history.

As Sharon Ringe has noted,

> The Jubilee traditions found in Hebrew Scriptures are rich in images of political liberation, economic reversal, and social revolution. Those images in the various historical and social contexts of ancient Israel made and continue to make significant claims about God and about the ethical consequences of being the people of God.[10]

6) Jesus Witness to the Good News of the Kingdom of God

Abrupt shifts in direction and possibility continued to mark the subsequent historical pilgrimage of hope among the Jews. In particular, after conquest by Roman armies in 63 BCE, resulted in yet another re-structuring of Palestinian life. This one, by Jewish elites in collusion with Roman elites, may have served these elites and the upper classes generally. Certainly they enjoyed great wealth, status, and power. But the control of the land concentrated in the hands of a few, the massive burden of taxes to support royal and priestly building projects and the military, and the systematic use of terror to crush every expression of the dignity and rights of the poor majority, including widespread torture and crucifixion—all resulted in widespread poverty and the corresponding psychosomatic syndromes, like much blindness, alienation,

[10] Sharon Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 33.

depression and despair, incarnate expressions of a life-destroying social (dis)order. No aspect of life escaped the effects of this kind of social order.[11]

The Bible gives testimony to the difficulties of the task of keeping hope alive in apparently hopeless situations, perhaps above all in the Book of Job. And the Christian scriptures give much evidence that the first century CE was such a period. But, as we have seen, the Bible also witnesses throughout to the stubborn persistence against all odds of hope for the Kingdom of God. As Fuellenbach notes, the expression *Kingdom of God* appears only once in the entire Old Testament..." (Wis. 10:10).[12] But, he continues,

> In the latest period of Old Testament thought the idea of the Kingdom of God had developed to the point where it could carry the full weight of being a great arch extending from the first chapters of the Bible to the last. Under it, all other elements and stories must find their place."[13]

And the idea of the Kingdom of God permeates the Christian scriptures as well. It "must have been something every Jew understood" in the first century CE.[14]

Indeed, Latin American liberation theologians, among others, have insisted that Jesus preached not himself, but fidelity to the Kingdom. As Jon Sobrino insists, "the most certain historical datum about Jesus' life is that the concept which dominated his preaching, the reality which gave meaningfulness to all his activity, was 'the kingdom of God.'"[15] In Fuellenbach's words, Jesus "seemed to have raised the phrase *Kingdom of God* to the level of a heuristic scheme for understanding God's purpose in human affairs."[16]

And surely we are called to do so at this between times of millennial transition.

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There are two other important truths revealed in the bible.

[11] Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day* (Queenston, ON: Edwin Mellon Press, 1986); and Richard Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989), esp. chaps. 5-7.

[12] John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 25.

[13] Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 53.

[14] Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 25.

[15] Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, Trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 41.

[16] Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 25.

7) The Creative Calling of Theology

At the centre of the bible is the challenging revelation that fidelity to the Spirit revealed in the bible always involves more than simple repetition of biblical fundamentals, simple recovery of certain texts. For the bible calls us—requires us—to theological creativity as we wrestle, in changing historical circumstances, with the inspiration at its heart. As the bible makes clear again and again, fidelity requires: (i) reading the "signs of the times" (in our day drawing especially on the social sciences, among other discourses); rereading biblical traditions searching for revelatory and inspiring insights concerning current realities, trends, possibilities; and (iii) concrete historical judgments concerning the next steps in configuring our personal lives, as families, communities, groups, movements, and societies.

At the end of the 20th century, in the midst of globalization processes transforming the whole world, theology has an important role to play in articulating alternative visions of hope, and in critically exposing the idolatry at the heart of policies contributing to greater inequality, injustice and ecological devastation.

And theology has a creative role to play within the church, in debates over the changing character of the church's mission in a changing historical context, and the most promising ways to renew church institutions and structures to witness concretely to the "good news" of the coming reign of God in this time.

8) Repentance, Conversion and Renewal

Forgetfulness, ignorance, sin, heresy, apostasy, blasphemy, idolatry are not the only, or always the major, causes of suffering and defeat, as Job learned the hard way, and his friends never learned. Often the sheer magnitude of historical change requires fundamental rethinking and reorientation. In specific contexts various combinations and permutations of these factors play roles.

Nevertheless, the re-creation of authentic hope seems always to involve repentance, conversion, and renewal of the people, and of the "people of God"—i.e., of all those in synagogues/churches nurturing fidelity to the Spirit of the bible, and of their established expressions of mission, pastoral priorities, internal structures, roles and procedures.

Renewal of theology and of the church is essential to the renewal of hope for the new millennium, for authentic Christian witness to the Spirit of Jubilee in collaborating with others in the inauguration a new epoch.

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Lee Cormie is professor of Theology at University of St. Michael's College.

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2

Sabbath and Jubilee: Radical Alternatives for Being Human

Sylvia C. Keesmaat

Introduction

When an international coalition of Christians proclaim the audacious vision of jubilee for our world, they are proclaiming the vision of Sabbath. *Sabbath?!* Not only in the New Testament, but also in our own world, "sabbath-keeping" is associated with constricting legalism and a list of (mostly) "don'ts". How can this out-dated custom empower any sort of vision of change for freedom in our world? In good prophetic biblical tradition, however, sabbath and jubilee stand at the centre of a way of viewing ourselves and the world which stands in radical opposition to the central values and beliefs of our consumer-militarist culture. Sabbath is a challenge, as we shall see, to precisely those societal forces which enslave us.

What is more, sabbath not only stands in judgement on our dominant cultural paradigm it also brings to a societal climax the two major themes of the scriptures of Israel: that of God as creator of the whole of the earth and everything in it; and that of God as the one who reveals God's self as liberator in the exodus. This piece will explore how central aspects of the biblical story come to their climax in sabbath and jubilee, as well as the way that sabbath and jubilee are present throughout the whole of the biblical story. I have, in good biblical tradition, seven points.

1. *Sabbath is rooted in creational gift, and as such nurtures an attitude of basic trust.*

Sabbath comes at the climax of the creation story as the crown of creation.[1] It is that in which God's creative endeavours find fulfilment. After the giftedness of a good creation, given to humankind to steward and nurture, there is the giftedness of rest, of ceasing from labour, of settling back to enjoy the fruit of labour from the other six days, of renewal after work.

At a very basic level, the giftedness of creation means that there is no need to keep frantically working to produce security in our lives--six days are enough for the whole of creation to fruitfully come into being and sustain us. What we have is not a result of unceasing striving but the result of gift from God. God will provide.

Such giftedness is not only present at creation, but is constitutive of God's interactions with Israel. Our God is a God who provides manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16.2-30). Israel, in the midst of desert and wilderness discovers her God as one who would provide food that is pure gift. And central to the story is sabbath. Every other day the manna would begin to rot if kept over night. But not the seventh day; on that day there was unexpected lavishness, enough to last another day. Their saving of food went against the "common sense" of what they had learned all

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[1]This is in contrast to most tellings which would argue that humans are the crown of creation. See Larry Rasmussen *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Orbis, 1996), 232.

week when they tried to store food. Over against the anxiety and fear of starving in the wilderness Israel had to learn not only of the giftedness of her life there, but also of the over-abundant giftedness of sabbath.

Woven throughout the Biblical story this giftedness of creation repeatedly calls the people to trust: in the jubilee legislation itself, where God emphasizes that in the sixth year God will order blessing on the land so that it produces for *three* years (Lev 20-23); in the calls to remember that the land they are in is not a result of their own striving but is a gift of their God (Deut 8 & 10); in the prophetic reminders that restoration in the land is rooted in God's love for the people and God's compassion for their suffering (eg. Hos 11.8,9; Jer 31.7-14); and, of course, throughout the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus' parables of the kingdom focus on the gracious abundance of the kingdom he is inaugurating. Repeatedly he describes the kingdom in terms of a meal or a banquet: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son . . ." (Matthew 22.1-4//Luke 14.15-24). Those who are faithful servants are those who give the other servants their food at the proper time (Luke 12 42), and the joy over finding the lost sheep, or the lost coin, or the lost son results in celebration and a killing of the fatted calf (Luke 15.3-32). Gifted abundance is the hallmark of this kingdom.

And there is more. The miracles of feeding huge crowds are not only examples of the abundance of the kingdom Jesus' is inaugurating, they also recall the giving of manna in the wilderness, reminding the people of the giftedness of God's salvation throughout their history (see Matt 14.13-21//Mark 6.30-44//Luke 9.10-17; Luke 7.31-35; John 6.1-13; Matt 15.32-39//Mark 8.1-9). The gracious abundance of Jesus' welcome in eating with tax collectors and sinners (see Luke 5. 29,30; 15.1,2) and his resultant reputation as a "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 11.19//Luke 7.34) is an example of how the proclamation of giftedness that Jesus described in the parables came to fruition in his own life and ministry.

Not only does sabbath reveal the gifted character of creation, it also reveals the basic character of God. This is a God who does not need to frantically worry that this creation will fall apart if God rests.[2] This is a God who can stop creative activity, who can declare it good and sit back to enjoy it. And knowing that engenders a "basic trust" in those of us who follow this God.[3] If God is not anxious or worried, those of us who image this God have no need for such anxiety either.

This basic trust in the giftedness of our existence is, of course, patently against the common sense of our own culture and time. We too live in a culture of anxiety and of fear. And sabbath calls to move beyond the constant striving of anxiety to a fundamental orientation of

[2]Brueggemann 1991: 151: "God's governance is not anxiety-ridden or frantic."

[3]Brueggemann 1991: 151.

trust in the world. Jubilee and sabbath call us to affirm a gifted economics of enough rather than a hoarding economics of scarcity.

2. *Sabbath models a radical egalitarianism which is itself rooted in generous redemption.*

Throughout the biblical account sabbath is rooted in both creation and redemption. While the ten commandments in Exodus 20 give God's creational rest as the basis for observing sabbath, Deuteronomy 5.12-15 states that the Israelites are to keep sabbath because they once were slaves and God has freed them. That act of gracious freeing is to be embodied by Israel once a week on the sabbath. On this day all are equal, slave and free, animal and human: "On the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed" (Exod 23.12). All are entitled to rest. Brueggemann describes this as "a day when all social class distinctions and differentiations of power are dramatically criticized, jeopardized and overcome."[4]

This egalitarianism is extended to the earth in the sabbatical years: every seventh year there is to be rest for the land as well (Exod 23.10-12; Lev 25.4). So important is this rest that the curses of Leviticus 26 expressly state if Israel is sent into exile, that will be so that the land may enjoy the rest that it was entitled to (Lev 26.34).

The fact that such egalitarianism is rooted in redemption is foundational to the critique which Jesus makes of first-century sabbath practices (see Mark 2.27-28; 3.1-5 etc). Where sabbath prevents redemption it has lost is roots in the story and its focus on salvation. Such egalitarianism stands as a radical alternative to the relentless hierarchy and oppression of the global economy. It asks fundamental questions about how the world is ordered and how we view people, animals and the land.

Those who enact this redemption are to mirror the lavish giftedness which God has bestowed on us. Sabbath freeing calls not only for slaves to be released but that this happen in a context of unexpected generosity. Freed slaves are to be given a fresh start by being provided with an abundance of animals, of grain and of wine (Deut 15.13,14). In an ethos of creational gift, redemption occurs as lavish giftedness.

But such generous redemption is not limited to the freeing of one's own household. The sabbatical year is precisely so that such freeing might be extended to *all* within Israel, human and non-human. So the land is to lie fallow in the seventh year in order that the poor may eat and what they leave the wild animals may eat (Exodus 23.10-11). Provision is made for those who, while not slaves, also need to experience a generous redemption. Similarly, Jesus not only describes the kingdom as a generous banquet, but calls his followers to emulate such abundance: "When you give a banquet", says Jesus, "Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, for they cannot repay you, for you will be paid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14.13-14).

[4]Brueggemann 1991: 152.

Interestingly, such lavish generosity became a hallmark of the believers after pentecost: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2.44-45). And although the early church had trouble maintaining the momentum of such a practice, it is clear from the apostle Paul's writings that he considers such generosity central to the calling of christians (see 1 Cor 8,9).

Again, this is fundamentally counter to the fearful hoarding of our culture, an ethos which makes it a virtue to stash all one's money in saving plans for retirement and where signs proclaiming "I want my tax cut now!" are not seen as manifestations of greed but rather as expressions of justice. The generosity of sabbath and jubilee stands in judgement on such attitudes.

3. *Jubilee and sabbath stand in judgment on idolatry and oppression.*

Both sabbath and jubilee are based on the premise that any economic system which is created and implemented by humanity will result in injustice precisely because human beings are, in their disobedience, fundamentally inclined towards idolatry. No matter what good initiatives we undertake, various forms of idolatry will continue to plague us. Whether that idolatry be the fertility religion of the ancient world or the economism, racism or nationalisms of our own time, the result is always the same--economic oppression and the disenfranchisement of the most vulnerable. Consequently the release from slavery and the restoration brought about by sabbath and jubilee will be necessary again and again.

The need for sabbath and jubilee legislation is striking given its context in the covenant between God and Israel. This is legislation which occurs in the context of torah, Israelite law. This law contains many provisions for looking after the poor: the laws of gleaning, that the poor might find food in the land (Deut 24.19-21; cf Exod 23.10-11); the instruction not to take someone's cloak as a pledge (Deut 24.17), or to return it at dusk (Exod 22.25-26; Deut 24.12-13; Lev 25.35-38); the laws against charging interest (Exod 22.25; Deut 24.19; cf Ezek 18.5-13); and the instructions for keeping one's kin our of slavery (Lev 25.35-38). Even in the context of such laws, sabbath and jubilee were necessary. They are an acknowledgement that justice is impossible for us to finally achieve on our own; it takes God's radical and gracious intervention again and again to ensure that justice and righteousness are present in the land.

Hence, the intimate association of the practice of justice and the keeping of sabbath throughout the prophets. In Isaiah 56, not only is the one who does justice also the one who keeps sabbath, but sabbath observance becomes the basis on which those normally excluded (gentiles and eunuchs) are to be admitted into the people of God (Isa 56.3-8). Similarly in Isaiah 58, Isaiah's call to loose the bonds of injustice and break every yoke (vv 6-7) culminates in the call to cease pursuing their own interests on the sabbath and take delight, rather, in the Lord (vv 13-14). The implications are clear: not keeping sabbath, continuing the relentless pursuit of one's own interest and affairs, makes it impossible to take delight in God. And it is only those who take delight in God who can finally live fruitfully in the land.

Similarly in Amos 8.4-6, those who "trample on the needy and bring ruin to the poor of the land" are clearly waiting for the sabbath to be over so that they may continue to offer wheat for sale at inflated prices and in false balances, "buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat" (v.6). In such a context of injustice, sabbath observance functions as a protection for the poor, giving them respite from relentless exploitation.[5]

This is likely why in Jeremiah 17.19-27, Jeremiah so boldly prophesies that whether the people of Jerusalem stop their buying and selling on the sabbath will determine whether Judah is prosperous enough to bring "burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense and thank offerings to the house of the Lord" (v. 26). Ironically, wealth shall stream into Jerusalem only if there is a break in the "making of wealth" on the sabbath; conversely if they continue to trade on the sabbath, they shall only be rubble (Jer 17.24-27). Again, the issue is where the people will put their trust.

Such an issue of trust is also at stake in Nehemiah 13.15-22, where Nehemiah forbids the opening of the gates of the city on the sabbath so that the merchants are unable to come in with their wares. When they persist in camping outside of the gates in the hope that they will be opened, Nehemiah threatens attack. This theme is, of course, carried forward in a number of ways in the New Testament. In Luke 12.13-21 we find a parable of judgement on the man who stores up treasures for himself (in bigger and bigger barns) and then whose life is demanded of him. And in James 4.13-17 we find a similar judgment on those who in their arrogance assume that business and profit are everything without acknowledging that God is ultimately the giver of what they have.

The point is, of course, that sabbath models an alternative way of being in the world. Brueggemann puts it this way:

> Sabbath observance is understood as a deep rejection of imperial patterns of exploitation. It is the dramatic act whereby this people asserts to itself and announces to a watching world that this is Israel, a different people with a different way in the world, who will not behave according to the expectations of the imperial world. In the purview of covenant, the stability of political life (v 25 [of Jer 17]) and the effectiveness of worship (v 26) depend on sabbath, an act that hands life back to God in trusting obedience. If life is not handed over to God regularly, with discipline and intentionality, then the entire political-religious system will end in destruction.[6]

This is something that we find very hard to hear in our culture, where our own self-sufficiency and striving are supposed to guarantee our success. Sabbath and jubilee stand explicitly counter to the assumption that we can achieve on our own all that we need or want,

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[5]Brueggemann 1991: 153.

[6]Brueggemann 1988:159.

even if what we need or want is justice. They are culture-condemning practices which ask: what do you fundamentally confess, what is your fundamental orientation, to whom do you think this world belongs? Sabbath and jubilee are an alternative way of being in the world, a counter-cultural act of handing all back to God in trust.

4. *Sabbath enables us to image God.*

Rather than bearing the image our culture calls us to, that of good consumers and dependable cheap labour, sabbath and jubilee call us to the image of a God which is breathtakingly different. Texts such as Genesis 1 and 2, and Psalm 8 reveal that our calling is to image our God, to be stewards of the good creation in which we are placed. The sabbatical emphasis on renewal for the earth reinforces our calling as stewards of creation, calling us anew to have responsible and caring dominion over the good gifts which God has given us in the earth.

But the God that we image is not only the creator God. This God is also one who hears the cry of the oppressed and frees them (Exod 2.23-25; 3.7-12), who heard Israel in Egypt and led them through the desert, who provided abundantly in the wilderness (Exod 16; Num 11), who forgave their idolatry and murmuring again and again (eg. Exod 32-34; Num 14). This is the God who calls the people to image God's self, who calls them to free slaves, for they once were slaves, who calls the people to provide abundantly for such slaves when they are released (Deut 15:14,15). This is the God who forgives the people and calls them to forgive one another's debts (Deut 15.1,2), this is the God who promises to make the desert into a fertile garden, with water gushing from the hills and the ground (eg. Isa 35,1,2; 41.17-20), and who calls God's people to give the land its rest so that it might be fruitful. This is the God who in Jesus calls us to forgive the debts of others as we have been forgiven (Matt 6.12-15; Matt 18.21-35; Luke 11.4). Throughout the story we are called to emulate and image this freeing, forgiving, fruit-bearing God.

Such image-bearing has to do with becoming holy as God is holy. At one point in the exodus account the Israelites are told that sabbath has been given to them "so that you may know, I, the Lord, sanctify you"(Exod 31.12-17). Similarly in Ezekiel 20 God states that he "gave Israel the sabbaths as a sign that I sanctify them . . ." (Ezek 20.12). Language of sanctification is, of course, language of holiness. And central to the exodus account is the call for Israel to be holy as God is holy. In practicing such holiness, we become more Godly, more fully the image of our God.[7]

If sabbath, then, is about becoming more Godly, that means sabbath is intimately tied with practising justice and righteousness, with being compassionate, with bringing salvation. Again, that is why Jesus' critique of sabbath practice was always linked with healing (the word

[7]I am entirely dependent for this section on a conversation with Michel Côté, who uses the language of divinization rather than image.

for healing in the greek is the same as the word for salvation). Sabbath is about becoming the kind of people who embody an alternative practice of righteousness, healing and compassion. And of course, such embodiment runs counter to the deadly practices demanded of us by the gods of profit and power which are dominant in our society.

5. *Sabbath and jubilee are rooted in a covenant community.*

In radical contradistinction to our culture of individualism and competition, jubilee and sabbath demonstrate the way in which people are called to live in covenant with God and each other. This is a communal ethic that enables the community to live in a way that is for the good of all of the people and for all of the land. This is not an ethic that trumpets the rights of any individual to exist on their own or to amass wealth on their own. One's economic status, whether, on the one hand, that be capital amassed in land or slaves or money, or, on the other hand, that be debt accrued, is the business of the whole community. The entire covenant community together is called to right the situation.

In the New Testament, however, the jubilee theme is widened out beyond the covenant community. You will recall that in the Leviticus legislation it was only Israelite slaves who were required to be released; foreign slaves could be kept (Lev 25.44-47). It was truly legislation for those within the covenant. In Luke 4.18-19, however, where Jesus is widely recognized to be proclaiming jubilee as central to his ministry, there is an overturning of such a narrowly nationalistic and ethnic covenantal emphasis. Jesus quotes from the first verses of Isaiah 61: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Isa 61.1-2a). He stops the quotation short, however, at a crucial point. The Isaiah text continues the proclamation by announcing "the day of vengeance of our God". Who was such vengeance to be against? The gentiles, of course! Jesus not only omits this line of judgment against the gentiles, he then goes on to compare his ministry to that of Elijah and Elisha. But the only two examples he uses are instances where Elijah and Elisha minister to gentiles! You can see why his people wanted to run him out of town.

Jesus has used the jubilee theme to overturn the inwardness and solely covenantal focus of the jubilee legislation itself! In the kingdom he is inaugurating, jubilee is for all the peoples, those within and those without the covenant boundaries. This does not mean that the emphasis on a communal ethic for living rightly before God, is negated. For as we saw above, the early christian community emphsized the importance of economic responsiblity and sharing in their interactions between one another. It does mean that finding the balance between an ethos which can shape a community ethic for living in the world, on the one hand, without collapsing into tribalism, on the other, is one of the challenges of jubilee.

6. *Sabbath and jubilee provide a vision which draws together the central biblical witness that is revealed in Jesus' life and that climaxes in the cross and resurrection.*

As we have seen above, Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4.18,19 is widely seen as a proclamation of jubilee. Others have pointed out that his concern for the poor and the oppressed picks up on sabbath and jubilee themes. This is undoubtedly true.

However, the whole of Jesus' ministry provides us an example of the enactment of sabbath and jubilee. Some of these themes have been discussed above. The way in which Jesus provides food in the wilderness (like God's generosity in the wilderness in the exodus), the way in which Jesus heals the sick, the way in which he casts out demons, the way in which he invites sinners and tax collectors to rejoice in his kingdom, the way in which he describes the welcoming banquet of his kingdom, the abundant graciousness and forgiveness he proclaims for sinners and demands that his followers proclaim as well, all of these things demonstrate the restoration of right relation and the freeing of oppression at a societal level, which is central to jubilee.

However, the jubilee ministry of Jesus culminates in the most radical freeing of all: his crucifixion on the cross, in which he proclaims the forgivenesss of all (even those who killed him); and the resurrection, which proclaims the renewal of all of creation once more. Jesus enacts in his death and resurrection the ultimate freeing from slavery and the ultimate restoration on the earth: he enacts the most radical jubilee one can imagine.

In attempting to shape our ethics, therefore, in a cross-shaped, a cruciform, way, we too proclaim the message of release from slavery and the gift of restoration that Jesus embodied. This is the message of jubilee for the christian community--this is where all the themes we have so far discussed find their sure centre and empowering ethos.

7. *Sabbath and jubilee are ultimately about entering into shalom.*

Throughout the Biblical story sabbath is frequently linked with rest: "God rested on the seventh day ... so God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation" (Gen 2.2,3); the people and the land have rest from war and from their enemies (Josh 11.23; 23.1; Judg 3.11; 5.31; 2 Sam 7.1 etc); only certain people will enter God's rest (Psalm 95.1; Heb 3.11, 4.9); Jesus promises rest to all those who come to him (Matt 11.28). In the prophetic writings, rest is central to the promises of the new age when God will come and dwell among the people (Jer 31, and especially Ezek 36). The latter texts especially make clear that this rest is linked with a wider peace and shalom: rest means that threat is gone, that basic trust can be the way in which one views the world, that enemies (human and animal and climactic) are no longer enemies, that all is well.

In the end, therefore, sabbath and jubilee are eschatological, they point towards the establishment of God's new age, God's kingdom of righteousness and peace for God's people on the earth. The justice and righteousness which sabbath and jubilee attempt to restore to the land are not something that we can ever achieve ourselves. We attempt to live jubilee because that is

our calling as image-bearers of our God and followers of Jesus. But in the end we know that God is the one who will finally effect any radical newness and freedom for the world. When we attempt to proclaim and enact the radically alternative way of being human that sabbath and jubilee envision, we point to the rest and shalom which God promises to bring when the kingdom comes finally and dramatically on earth. As imagebearers of this God, we can do no less.

Silvia Keesmaat is Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies and Hermeneutics at the Institute for Christian Studies.

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3

Re-engaging the Sabbath: A Look at Work and Leisure

Michel Côté, o.p.

Introduction

The purpose of this short paper is to raise the question about the Sabbath (rest) and its counterpart, work, in the overall context of Jubilee, that celebration of the special year of the Lord after seven Sabbath years. What would the concept of Sabbath imply for a society like ours so dominated by overwork and underwork? We will examine first our culture's understanding of work and leisure; then we will look at the biblical vision of work and Sabbath. Finally, we will analyze how we got here and where we need to go in the future.

I. The situation: work as a paradox

Most people in our culture today define themselves by what they produce:[1] *homo faber* (the make-er) reigns over *homo ludens* (the play-er) or *homo orans* (the pray-er). Work has become an essential part of our identity.[2] Hidden deep in today's collective psyche is the adage "I am what I do..." and even more "...if *what* I do **pays**." *Income* identifies *being and status*. Despite the many attempts to counteract segregation, our society has created divisions within itself by determining those who are *included* or *excluded* for reasons of sex, race, class or age. This same type of discrimination exists in the area of work, by the inclusion or exclusion of individuals, of whole sectors of the population or even of entire peoples. If a person is seen producing something effectively, preferably for the common good, that person will be considered a worthy contributor to society; if s/he is not able to 'produce' then the status of that person is impacted negatively. Work becomes a way of life and defines human nature. Even leisure time is run by the work ethic: places to see, things to do, other problems to solve.[3] Work is colored by the economic system that drives society's values. People end up living to work rather than working to live.

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[1] "Life is not made good by the things one does, ... life is a gift, not an achievement." Dittes, p. 113.

[2] The definition of work often appears gender-specific and related to productive remunerated work. Work should also cover the extraordinary 'production' of women caring for family and community members. Women's work is often unaccounted for in the official indexes of economic performance. One may also ask if speculating on the market is in fact work and if it helps in any way to promote the common good.

[3] Leisure, like work, can be seen as an instrumental commodity: people are sold relaxation, people *do* formation, development, culture, even religion or, worse still, go into 'zombie mode'. This form of leisure does not manage to truly re-energize, for people are 'motivated' by others and told when and how to 'relax'. See Martin, pp. 44-47 and Roszak, p. 231.

Work, it is true, has allowed society and its members to creatively defeat the shortcomings of nature.[4] The imagination of our ancestors, the collective accumulated knowledge if not wisdom of previous civilizations have made it possible for us to recognize not only the benefits of science and technology, but also of culture and religion. Work has taken away some of the fatalistic burdens that have beset humans in the past. It has allowed for the growth of the individual, of societies, and has left its stamp on the course of nature. Work presents itself as the reflected active solution to a vision of *what could be*. For many, work is exhilarating, joyful, energizing.

Though almost everybody is involved in it, there does not seems however to be a common agreed-upon definition of work.[5] In general, one could say that it consists in a human activity that alters the subject or surrounding objects or other persons. It has to do with our relationship to others, to nature and in some cases to God. It does not cover the whole of human existence nor can it provide the only path for life in all its complexity. The real purpose of our existence is ***life*** in fullness, work and even leisure being but part of God's gift to us.

Pre-industrial society accepted the rhythm of the sun and of the seasons as determinant of work-time With the transition from the tool to the machine, the industrial system began to treat work and workers as simple mechanical extensions of the new production mode.[6] Workers felt alienated because they did not own their work, or its results. Employers determined wages, activity, time of work and the final use of the product. Workers lost their sense of vocation and the responsibility for what they produced.

[4] It may be important to distinguish work in the rural context and work in the urban context. Urban work seems to have no time/space constraints. Rural work needs to follow the seasons and therefore might also entail hectic schedules at some times of the year.

[5] *The Random House Dictionary* defines work : "Exertion or effort to produce something; labor; toil. Productive or operative activity; performance." It is clear that this definition reflects the ideology and culture of the industrial age. Another definition of work is: "The full utilization of an individual's potential for material benefits and personality development through productive self-expression" Savary, p. 217. People working in the diamond mines of South Africa would certainly define work differently. Some authors give 'work' such a broad definition that it is identified with the whole salvific action of God and may be equated to 'grace', see West (1986) pp. 10-12. Herbert McCabe, summarizes: "To convey what we mean by work we need not a concrete concept, but a symbol." p. 216. No matter what dictionary one uses, the definition of 'work' in constantly-changing circumstances needs to be discussed by all members of society to find out how it is being fully experienced by those pained and/or exhilarated by it.

[6] In old societies, human relations were more important than work, J. Ellul (1980), p. 5. Even today, tribal societies give themselves considerable time for leisure and play (without minimizing however the real, at times oppressive work done by the women). Eicher (pp. 44-45) states that the Roman or Greek slave (and medieval serf) never worked more than the average office worker of 1970, who was protected by a collective agreement. There existed limitations set by the sunlight and by some 150 religious feast days when no one worked. "In fact men and women today have significantly less time for recreation, leisure and doing what they want to do than even the dependent workers of all the pre-industrialized civilizations."

Today, work has become the goal and god of our civilization.[7] Prodded on by the need for northern consumerism to acquire raw products and cheap labor, it moves at a hectic and alarming pace, dehumanizing many in the process.[8] Children today will never earn as much as their parents. But more than the actual loss of buying power is the loss of meaning that is felt when takeovers, mergers, downsizing, rationalizing and budgetary cuts make a mockery of seniority and company loyalty. It erodes worker solidarity and destabilizes the lives of many, beyond the actual workers themselves. Rather than being a blessing, work can destroy values, cultures, the ecology and even human life. In the last decades, the system of production has intentionally crossed over national boundaries and set up free-trade zones in labor-intensive industrial centers. People may have no choice in the work they have to do. Globalization requires over-work or no-work. The whole world seems to caught up in a vortex of "work or die"[9]. Must humans live like this? Is this the only way to be and to act here and now?

II. The Judeo-Christian understanding of work and leisure.

Though positioned in the beginning of the bible, the Genesis story is the result of many years of reflection about life as experienced by the Israelites. The relationship between the 'earthling' and God is like that of an image (Gen. 1:27). The mission and the destiny of humans flow from God: God creates; we co-create; God makes, we manufacture. Some godly dimension in humans allows them to imagine, plan and produce outside or inside themselves. The couple is linked not only by the root of their name but also by the mutual caring and nurturing of one for the other. Any human 'doing' implies treating the earth and its contents as God would by fostering ***life*** in the other and in creation (Gen. 2:15). Nurturing humanization is the goal of 'earthlings' within creation, not work. If work were the only goal of creation what would happen to contemplation, prayer and praise, to love and amusement, to frolic and imagination, to solidarity, playfulness and art for the common good, to reverence and awe before the beauty of nature and the intricacies of God's web of life?

[7] "An acquisitive society relates work to having, not to being; to owning, not to sharing; to getting, not to growing. By undermining our relatedness, by making it useless, an acquisitive society deadens the desire for good work." Soëlle, p. 100. Maybe this addictive sense of work exists more in the North American continent than in Europe where unionized workers politically decided to work less weeks per year than in the USA.

[8] "We discover that our work life has been infiltrated by clever strategies invented by planners and managers to seduce our allegiance and manipulate our energy for the greater glory of the system." Roszak, p. 213.

[9] "Not repose but movement was what satisfied the bourgeois striving after the acquisition of property... life is perpetual motion." Eicher, p. 45. Oddly enough the only creatures who live like this are sharks. This need to conquer, amass, control ultimately runs amok over many unfortunate children, women and men, and even the earth, crushing them but also infecting with its cancer the subjects who propagate this need. No one wins; all lose.

Contrary to common belief, work itself is not the result of sin; rather, some *toilsome* work is.[10] The first scene in Genesis ('pre-Fall') is one where joy and beauty are immediate rewards to activities that are gratuitous and non-necessary, like games. But after having played god and sinned, humans found in the opening of the earth (field) and of the womb (childbearing) an experience of pain. In the Hebrew scriptures work is a 'biblical given' simply in order to survive. It flows from human nature without identifying with it. It is the necessary human contribution that God wills so as to bring about the fullness of humanity within creation.

Whereas the surrounding religions saw work as the task that humans assumed in order to lessen the burden of the gods, Judaism viewed work as an imitation of God. Work was simply part of human nature and served to enhance it.[11] Work was never meant to be an end in itself; the glory of God was. Humans could not work apart from God. God was always in the work, providing the elements as Creator, and the sustenance of the worker. Many of us work as if God was not part of the equation. All is basically gift and we need to trust that God will be there for us, yet perhaps not with the responses that correspond to our present cultural expectations.

The Genesis story concludes with God's 'resting' (Gen. 2:1-3). From this comes the Sabbath mandate.[12] In order for them not take their doings or productions too seriously, God models what humans need to learn: rest. This seventh day shows how God gives humans a personal place to slip into the life of the divinity, into a place of shalom, rest and blessedness[13].

In Israel's time, the Sabbath was God's holy day (Ex 20:8-11), a special sign of the Alliance between God and the Israelites (Ex 31:16). It was to be embedded in time, as a reminder of the place of God in their lives[14]. God remains the reason for work; work itself is thus

[10] It is clear that toilsome oppressive work today is not the result of the worker's sin but that of structured social sin. The toilsomeness is tied to the level of choice/freedom of the worker. The pain or joy of working are not necessarily linked to sin. More space would be required to clarify here the full meaning of Genesis 3:17.

[11] For example Prov. 10:4; 24:30-34; 6:6-11;16:1; Ps 104:19-23; 128:2; Eccl. 2:18-24; 3:12-13; 5:18) The burden of work is not always due to the harshness of nature. The prophets will cry out against those who impose unjust burdens on their own (cf. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah). They could not understand that a people of ex-slaves would enslave their own all over again.

[12] The Sabbath from the outset is truly a unique Israelite invention, Dederen, p. 295, note 1.

[13] The Hebrew word for 'rest' means inner-recreation or self-transformation; it is contrary to productive work, Branson, p. 268.

[14] "For the Priestly tradition it [the seven-day week] sets worship above cosmic order (Ex 20:11, 31:17); for the Deuteronomy it sets up, against the compulsion of work, God's action of liberation from the entire situation of work (Dt 5:15). For the prophets it is a symbol of the covenant, symbolizing Israel's basic structure as the people of God (Ez. 20:12,20)." Eicher, p. 48. "Time is internal, transcendent, sovereign... it belongs exclusively to God... We share time, we own space. Through my ownership of space, I am a rival of all other beings; through my living in time, I am a contemporary of all other beings." Branson, pp. 273-4.

relativized.[15] Abiding by the Sabbath implies accepting to be critical and counter-cultural, reminding ourselves that we owe everything to God. It is not an empty time but one turned to the Source (in celebration and worship?) to re-align our goals and re-direct our energies.[16]

Part of the Sabbath's beauty lay in the fact that it destroyed any status differences that might have been established during the week[17]. It gave rise to the Sabbatical year (remission from creditors: Dt. 15:1-11; Lv. 25:1-7) and the Jubilee year (remission from slavery: Lv. 25:8-19) where the Law sought to re-establish the original equality and unity of the people. The Sabbath had eschatological significance by showing how it could be a sign of hope, an indication of the "freedom and restoration awaited by the entire creation..., a sample of the eternal peace to come ... when all oppression and strife will cease."[18] The importance of keeping the Sabbath is highlighted by the fact that it was one of the Ten Commandments.

If the Sabbath was so wonderful why was it judged so harshly by Jesus?[19] It would seem that the Pharisees had lost sight of its real purpose. Thus Jesus re-directs the Sabbath to its proper end, the wholeness of all creation, the service to both God and humans.[20] Rather than creating a sacred/profane split in the week where religion and world break away from one another, Jesus' reaction indicates that as important as the Sabbath is, humanizing for ***life*** is now the priority.

III. Work and leisure today

[15] "This upsets the myths of efficiency, of productivity, of output and return." Martin, pp. 40-41.

[16] Thus 'resting' is more than 'relaxing'; it is completely trusting in God's Providence and dropping out of the production mode at given times of the month. For the Israelites it especially meant counting on God on the seventh and fiftieth years, Dederen, p. 298.

[17] Slaves, animals and even earth all are given time to recuperate. "Is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man's (*sic*) progress than the Sabbath? it is the day on which we learn the art of surpassing civilization." Branson, p. 274.

[18] Dederen, p. 300.

[19] Mt. 12:3-8; Mk. 2:27; Lk. 13:15-17; Jn. 5:16-18. Did Jesus throw out the Sabbath? Some authors think so. See LaRondelle, p. 279-81. His death and resurrection changed its importance as a sign of the Covenant: Jesus himself becomes the new Covenant, the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:8). Ultimately "there is no connection between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday. The former represents the conclusion of the week, the latter its beginning." Cornfield, p. 800.

[20] Jesus "demolishes the barriers of time devoted to work and time devoted to rest..." Eicher, p. 48. This breaking open of time to include work and leisure in the realm of religion might have been the basis of a good Protestant work ethic that unfortunately, in its worst expressions, gave a quasi-fanatical religious quality to work but saw leisure progressively relegated, as a religious fact, to off-work time. Jesus shows that caring takes priority over an exclusive worship to God.

It was only between the fourth and the eighth centuries that Sabbatical qualities were applied to the Lord's Day. In the Industrial Age, the Eighth Day (Sabbath) became a day of rest and of awareness of God, a day of religion, a day of private life, a day to do what one wished as an alternative to work, ultimately a day for a very truncated understanding of 'leisure.'

It was mostly the eighteenth century middle-class understanding of work that molded the ethic we follow today. Rather than withdrawing from work as did the nobility and the hierarchy, the bourgeois threw themselves completely into it redefining both work and world.[21] Because Christianity did not correspond to the expectations of the entrepreneurs and because the workers, who were uprooted farmers, lost their relationship with their past beliefs, there was a need to provide an alternate sense to life.[22] Work gave everyone a new sense of direction and validation.[23] It also provided the incentive for the development of a new civilization, the Industrial Age. God seemed to confirm this way of living by granting accrued economic prosperity; the existence and development of technology confirmed the European (entrepreneur/ adventurer) in his sense of superiority not only over nature but over the rest of humanity.

The success and prestige of the entrepreneurs became a model for the workers who were also invited to work hard so that they too could have money to buy the consumer goods that would satisfy their needs and keep the system running. Everyone was put to work in the factories as well as in the schools. Of course, this left those who were in neither place in a socially unenviable position.

As work was redefined, so was leisure. Leisure has become a time "to recuperate, to compensate for the physical exhaustion and nervous wear-and-tear caused by work, and to afford a temporary escape from the dependence and frustrations experienced in work". Or again it is a time/space/feeling for "fresh new experiences, for self realization, for communion, for social integration, for fantasy, for play, for creative life, etc."[24] It "is a time for rediscovering the meaning and purpose of Life, for seeing the pursuit of living in its wholeness. Leisure is the

[21] "The ideology of work was, through industrial expansion a complete creation of the bourgeoisie class...For the bourgeoisie placed work above all other concerns...This 'morality' is used not necessarily to bind others to it but rather to justify what one does himself or herself." Mendes, p. 30. "It is safe to hazard the guess that managers and executives of today work hours as were worked in the last century only by the exploited proletariat." Eicher, p. 45.

[22] "One of the great betrayals of the Church was to provide the exploiters with the theological instrument that would justify their behaviour and ensure their domination. For it was very easy to constantly remind the exploited worker that this was the will of God." Mendes, p. 33. This same ideology seems to prevail even today among Church workers who are asked to overwork and among the professionals who themselves have bought into the modes of efficiency and activism.

[23] The Catholic Church aligned itself with the bourgeoisie who needed the cheap labor of the workers while the Protestant work ethic promoted work as a virtue, no matter at what cost. Rather than critiquing the system, the Churches (reluctantly?) supported its expansion and hegemony.

[24] Eicher, p. 47 and p. 44. It is interesting to observe that work thus specifies leisure. Leisure does not seem to have any identity of its own.

occasion for the development of broader and deeper perspectives and for renewing the body, mind and spirit. This is the kind of self-learning and self-understanding that forms the basis of true selfhood and provides perspective for the person's involvement in society."[25]

These various approaches to the reality of leisure show paradoxically how overly important work has become in our lives. There are very few public models of healthy leisure today. There may be hobbies and particular activities for individuals. Maybe some Zen and Christian practices could help us put our work in context.[26] But the problem seem to be around collective leisure. Can we develop real leisure with practical solutions other than the god of sport, game show circuses, tractor drags, time to do-what-I-couldn't-do-while-at-work, etc.? How can we encourage more communal celebrations of life with family, friends and local community?[27]

Conclusion

From the perspective of a mystic, such as Thomas Merton, work does not always make sense: "The universal and modern man (*sic*) ... cannot understand that a living thing might perhaps be without usefulness; nor does he understand that, at bottom, it is the useful that may be a useless...burden."[28] If work does not fulfill all of the person, neither can leisure:

> Work and leisure from the viewpoint of human development are in a number of ways complementary to each other, especially in the sense that some of the same rewards (social participation, interesting experiences, opportunities for creative self-expression, sources of self-respect and the respect of others) can be obtained both through work and through leisure.[29]

Gratuitousness is of the essence. What if things just *are*. In other words, what if humans were not defined by work, but by a work *and* leisure continuum as seen in the seven day Genesis story and picked up in the Sabbath and Jubilee tradition?

Certainly the greatest contribution in terms of the theology of work and leisure is coming to us today from women theologians. Carol Gilligan states that "males tend to have difficulties

[25] Robert Lee, *Religion and Leisure in America*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1964, p. 34 as quoted in Neale, p. 14.

[26] A delightful little book by Ernie J. Zelinski (1991) presents all kinds of interesting ways to break away from our work habits and enter into the world of leisure. For example, a shorter work week, shared work, added holidays, etc.

[27] Some forms of cultural or ethnic public events in Toronto are found in the inter-cultural Caravana, the Caribana Festival, the First Night celebrations, etc. which are attempts at leisure (and fun!) without overt economic benefits for major sponsors.

[28] Mitcham, p. 5.

[29] Savary, p. 173.

with relationships, while females tend to have problems with individuation."[30] To this Elizabeth Nash adds that "a proper way to evaluate work might be to assess how much it enables the good relationships between people."[31]

In an attempt to explicate this, Rosemary Radford Ruether writes:

> A humanized society must be one reintegrated into those values cultivated in the female sphere: co-operation, mutual support, leisure, celebration, free creativity, and exploration of feelings and personal relations...Work itself must be seen as a means to the end of self-expression, mutual help and fulfillment of being, rather than all existence shaped by a program of alienated labor. We do not exist in order to work, but we work in order to be... It is this vision of the recovery of the world of work for women, which is at the same time the de-alienation of work and the rediscovery of community, that must be the distinctive value which women should bring to the question of work.[32]

The above statements could also apply to leisure. If more space were given to cooperation rather than competition, to interdependence rather than independence, to listening to pain rather than to pride, the world would take on a whole new coloring. If with a theology of work and leisure we developed a *theology of 'enough'*: rationing the world's resources, the consumption of humans, scaling back of the role of the machine in our lives, the hours of work, promoting labor-intensive solidarity rather than capital intensive work, etc. then again the world would be different. The market economy ***needs*** our consumer habits; otherwise it would dry up. Therein lies our strength, but also our greatest challenge. Can we find alternative ways of organizing our lives?

We cannot afford to be naive. The Goliath of neo-capitalism will not fall easily. Many powerful people have a stake in keeping their present life-style; and they want it primarily for themselves. The trouble is that, like a cancer that ultimately grows to the point of destroying its own host, it sucks the life out of others while it annihilates its authors. It may only be through alternative Christian communities who decide to name the pain and describe the beast, that the dehumanizing illusion can be exposed for what it is. The road ahead is not easy. However, it would be easier if those who believed in the 'impossible' had a common understanding of the vision of work and leisure that allowed for new life, and followed through with it in their every day practices.

Michel Côté is a Dominican Friar whose experience as a worker-priest brought him to give many workshops and retreats in the last 20 years across Canada on the links between faith and justice. He does simultaneous translation for most national ecumenical gatherings and many other international development meetings. He also is presently a Doctoral candidate at the Toronto School of Theology.

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[30] Gilligan Carol, *In a Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, p. 8

[31] Nash, p. 24.

[32] Radford Ruether, p. 83.

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4

Jubilee and Peace

Michel Andraos

"For all, least no less than greatest,
all are out for dishonest gain;
prophet no less than priest, all practice fraud.
They dress my people's wound without concern:
'Peace! Peace!' they say, but there is no peace.
They should be ashamed of their abominable deeds
But not they!
They feel no shame, They have forgotten how to blush.
And so as others fall, they too shall fall;
they shall be thrown down when I come to deal with them
--says Yahweh." (Jer. 6:13-15)[1]

Peace at this moment in our history is only a dream far from the actual daily reality of the majority of the world population and the rest of God's creation on earth. Greed, consumerism, competitiveness, cuts to social spending, health care and education, unemployment, poverty, the gap between rich and poor, conflicts, wars and ecological destruction are on the rise globally and are causing a remarkable increase of structural and interpersonal violence. Reading a daily newspaper or watching the news on television every day witnesses to this fact. The earth and its inhabitants are groaning for salvation and peace (Rom. 8:22-25). *"Peace! Peace! they say, but there is no peace."*

Jubilee and Peacemaking

The Holiness Code in Leviticus 25, which laid down the foundations of the Jubilee practice, was a law intended to create conditions for peace among the people. There is no explicit mention of peace in the Jubilee laws or their explanation. However, it is not a coincidence that the section on peace in the book of Leviticus (Lev. 26:3-13) follows the chapter on the Year of Jubilee. It is clear, in the views of biblical scholars, that the laws of Jubilee fit the category of regulations which were designed with the "the interests of peace" in mind.[2] The Jubilee recommendations, reflecting an eschatological and messianic desire for *shalom,* are best

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[1] Biblical quotations are from the Jerusalem Bible.

[2] Jonathan Magonet, "Judaism and a Global Ethic," in *Yes to a Global Ethic, Voices from Religion and Politics*, Hans Küng, ed., John Bowden, trans. Continuum, New York, 1996, pp. 94-95.

understood in the biblical framework of the Reign of God. And peace in the New Testament is an important characteristic of the Reign of God on earth, as proclaimed by Jesus.[3]

The notions of jubilee, peace, and the Reign of God incorporate elements of social protest against the dominant cultural norms and values of social inequality, against false peace that is build on domination, and against the worship of idols of power. Genuine peace is the work of the Spirit and is the fruit of worshiping the true God of life; worshiping the false gods of greed and power brings only false peace (John 14:27).

However, there has been relatively little contemporary theological reflection on peacemaking in terms of the relevant pastoral praxis to respond to structural violence--the main source of the other forms of social and interpersonal violence--and promote a culture of peace. Study of peace in the Bible (*shalom* in the Hebrew scriptures and *eirene* in the New Testament) requires further work to explain the fuller and more active meaning of peace as peacemaking.[4] *Shalom* and *eirene* do not exhaust all that the scriptures have to say about peace; but, despite the multiple meanings of *shalom* in different contexts, reflection on them does shed light on the deeper notion of peace in the Bible.

Peace in Scriptures[5]

In general terms, the Hebrew word *shalom* (same as *salaam* in Arabic and *shlomo* in Syriac and Aramaic), commonly translated as 'peace,' is derived from a root that means well-being, being whole, intact, complete, reestablishing things according to their original integrity, rendering to people what is owed to them. Biblical peace does not imply only an agreement that permits a tranquil life, or simply a 'time of peace' as opposed to a 'time of war'; it means well-being in daily existence, a state of being in harmony with oneself, with others, with nature, and with God. *Shalom* is a general description of a life of blessing, rest, glory, material goods, salvation, good health, security, agreement in family life, mutual confidence, agreement of a good neighbourhood, and enjoyment with everyone of material and spiritual goods. This life in *shalom* is a gift from God and it is God's desire for all people is to live in peace. Peace is also the fruit and sign of justice and is obtained through works of justice and trusting prayer.

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[3] Julio de Santa Ana, "Fundamentos de la Paz: una Reflexion Teológica," in *Hacia Una Cultura de la Paz*, Simón Espinosa, ed., Comision Sudamericana de Paz, Consejo Latino Americano de Iglesias (CLAI), Venzuela, Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1989 , p. 68.

[4] Perry B. Yoder and Willard M. Swartley, eds. *The Meaning of Peace. Biblical Studies*. Studies in Peace and Scripture, Institute of Mennonite Studies. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, Preface.

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Perry Yoder, in his review of the biblical exegesis of *shalom,* notes that the term refers to different meanings in different contexts. He echoes Von Rad in affirming that *shalom* "is a general expression of a very comprehensive nature," which means that there is "something imprecise about it in almost every instance."[6] In commenting on the works of H. H. Schmid and Claus Westermann, Yoder notes too that the use of *shalom* as the opposite of force or war was a late, deviant development in the Bible. The more basic biblical insight, he notes, is that *shalom* could come as a result of a war. *Shalom* is also linked to establishing the right order in creation. In other words, he concludes, "thought about *shalom* is ... embedded in the wider context of the Bible's understanding of creation and order."[7]

While *shalom* generally concerns collective material well being,[8] *eirene* adds to *shalom* spiritual and eschatological dimensions (John 14:27). In addition, a central theme in the New Testament understanding of peace and peacemaking, especially in the Pauline theology (Eph. 2:15-17; Col 1:20), is reconciliation. Through Jesus the world was reconciled with God, and peace is the fruit of this reconciliation. In the context of social conflicts, reconciliation means restitution: returning to people what rightfully belongs to them; it does not mean a return to the previous *status quo* or to an unjust imposed 'order' (as is the case with the 'new world order' where the majority of the world's population is deprived of their basic rights to a dignified life). Reconciliation in this context means inverting the 'order,' giving a fair share of wealth to the poor majority.[9]

Despite the contextual variations in the use of the words *shalom* and *eirene*, a number of biblical scholars agree that both words reflect the ethical priorities of social justice and peace. In other words, peace in scriptures has a social dimension; it is not enjoyed only by individuals apart from questions about social order. It involves a process of social change towards the common good of all.[10]

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[6] Perry B. Yoder, "Introductory Essay to the Old Testament Chapters: *Shalom* Revisited," Yoder and Swartley, p. 4.

[7] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[8] William Klassen affirms von Rad's observation that "there is not one instance in the Old Testament in which *shalom* designates a specific inner attitude or internal peace. *Shalom* has to do with the many. It is a social concept." G. von Rad, "*eirene*," TDNT 2(1964):405-6, quoted in William Klassen, *Love of Enemies: the Way to Peace. Overtures to Biblical Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 40.

[9] For further theological commentary on reconciliation, liberation and peace, cf. José Comblin, *Reconciliación y Liberación*, Santiago de Chile: CESOC, Ediciones Chile y América, 1987, pp. 60-71; see also Harold Wells, "Theology for Reconciliation," in Gregory Baum and Harold Wells, eds., *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches,* New York: Orbis Books; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1977, 1-15.

[10] Cf. Perry B. Yoder, "Introductory Essay to the Old Testament Chapters: *Shalom* Revisited," in Yoder and Swartley, 3-13; also in the same book, Willard M. Swartly, "Introducing the New Testament Essays on Eirene," 151-155; See also Otto Schnübbe, Der Friede (shalom) im Alten und Neuen Testament - eine notwendige Korrektur, [Peace (shalom) in Old and New Testaments - an Important Correction], Hannover: Lutherisches Verladshaus, 1992, 9-11.

Peace in scriptures is not an abstract idea. It is a gift from God; it is also a task. Peace involves a pragmatic approach to life inspired by a divine promise and an eschatological vision that is meant to "guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79). Hence, a theological reflection on peace involves not only a reflection on the meaning of peace; it also involves a contextual critical reflection on society's socioeconomic, political and cultural relations to transform these relations in the interest of peace for all. A theological reflection on peace demands an analysis of the social context: What are the forces in a particular context that are working against peace? What is preventing the realization of peace and instead creating violence? How do we transform these conditions to create conditions for peace? Working for peace means working to change these forces and engaging in peacemaking.

Speaking from a Catholic perspective, Stephen Lammers notes that although the theme of peace is strongly present in Catholic social teaching and in the discourse of the popes and church leaders, the Catholic Church has not yet "... thought through very well ... how the church's conversation on peace, if and when it reaches a consensus on a particular issue, leads to action for peace at the local level.... The issue here is how little reflection there has been on how the Catholic community might display its beliefs about peace..."[11] I believe this is true for most other Christian churches and faith communities as well.

True Peace versus False Peace

The Bible makes a distinction between true peace and false peace. False prophets were proclaiming peace and deceiving the people when there was no peace in the land (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; 28:9). True peace, as understood in scriptures, "does not consist in mere prosperity and well being; an essential component of peace is righteousness, and where there is no righteousness there is no genuine peace."[12] Genuine peace is built on justice and the common good of all, not the security and well-being of a few.

The meaning of peace in scripture has a much wider application than reaching agreements among parties involved in an armed conflict. But resolving such conflicts is an important part of the larger social process of building peace. Most of the peace processes in the world today are not successful because they fail to take into account some fundamental ethical principles; they are not built on true reconciliation and justice. Rather, they are imposed on the people, built on domination and exclusion, and motivated by arrogance, greed, fear and insecurity; and, in most cases, they are mediated by parties who lack the ethical credibility. (Perhaps the best example is the failure of the peace initiatives brokered by the United States in the Middle East, after more than two decades of peace talks.) I am not suggesting that building true peace respecting the rights and dignity of all is an easy task; but the present "new world

[11] Stephen E. Lammers, "Peace," in The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought, Judith A. Dwyer, ed., Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994, p. 721.

[12] *"Peace,"* In Dictionary of the Bible, John L. McKenzie, S.J., Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1965.

order," motivated by greed, economic competitiveness and domination, seems to lack the minimum ethical requirements for mediating the making of just and lasting peace.

Don Samuel Ruiz, the bishop of the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico, has long experience as mediator in the conflict between the Zapatista rebels and the Mexican government. He affirms that, from a Christian perspective, certain forms of peace are not acceptable.[13] Peace that is reached through the suppression and extermination of "the enemy" is not the peace that God desires, adds the Bishop. Other forms of peace promote return to the status quo existing before the conflict, a situation that for some was a nightmare of exploitation and oppression. This too, says Bishop Ruiz, is not an acceptable form of peace. True peace involves working towards a new situation and based on important human values of fraternity, democracy, true liberty and the respect of the human rights of all. True peace is a gift from God, and it is also a task. It requires a genuine reconciliation that, in the Bishop's words:

> assumes a real change in the relationship with God and others. It does not consist in a mere change of feelings; it is rather the objective transformation of a situation. Peace with God is intimately linked with our interior peace and social peace. It cannot be separated from them because where social, political, economic and cultural inequalities exist, there is a rejection of the God of history.[14]

True peacemaking is an essential component of evangelization--bringing the good news of peace (Acts 10:36)-- and of continuing to proclaim and build the Reign of God in history. Peacemaking is not one among other tasks of the Christian churches; rather, it identifies the believing community, and is an essential component of its mission.[15]

[13] On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN), an indigenous community-based army in the south-east of the state of Chiapas, Mexico, declared war against the Mexican government and demanded political and economic reforms to improve the lives of the native people of Chiapas and Mexico in general, and to include them in the economic development of their country. After only eleven days of fighting they reached a cease-fire with the Mexican Federal Army, under great pressure from both Mexican and international groups endorsing the demands of the EZLN. Samuel Ruiz, the Catholic bishop of the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, was nominated by the EZLN to be the mediator of the peace talks with the Mexican government; later he became president of the National Mediation Commission (CONAI) which has continued the work of mediation.

[14] Samuel Ruiz, "Mensaje para la Reconciliación y la Paz," in *Chiapas: El Evangelio de los Pobres, Iglesia, Justica y Verdad*, Temas de Hoy, Mexico, 1994, pp.171-172, my translation.

[15] Samuel Ruiz, "Mediaciones de Conflictos de Alta Intensidad, Perspectivas de la Mediación de un Obispo en Conflictos Sociales de Alta Intensidad." In CENCOS-Iglesias, Mexico City, December, 1995, p.3-5, my translation.

"Peace! Peace! they say..."

Building a culture of peace at this moment in history stands in opposition to the values promoted by the dominant global economic and political system. The peace promised by the global market forces cannot be identified with the peace promised by the Word of God. The new order of creation, as described in the biblical vision of *shalom*, stands in opposition to the 'new world order' that we are witnessing. The ethics of the 'new world order'--competitiveness at any price, consumerism and individualism--are promoting structural, social and interpersonal violence on a global scale, and destruction of the rest of God's creation. We are witnessing a global empire of powerful multinational corporations expanding their dreams of greed, domination and security at the expense of destroying the dreams of the poor people of the earth and their peace. The irony is that all this is happening while they continue to preach 'prosperity and peace.'[16] This situation makes the words of Jeremiah, quoted at the beginning of this reflection, more pertinent than ever.

Peacemaking is a task. But in the final analysis peace is a gift from the God of life; it is the work of the Spirit among us. Working for peacemaking demands a trusting attitude in the God of life and in the Spirit of God at work in our world. "People who would care for peace can learn from Buber's characterization of miracle," notes the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann, as "any experience which leaves us with 'abiding astonishment.' Abiding astonishment about the reliability of the world is a basis on which to reflect on the task of making peace. People who lack sense of astonishment are likely to take themselves too seriously, and for them the world may finally become too anxious. Peace cannot come from anxiety but only from confidence..."[17]

Therefore, as we prepare to celebrate the beginning of the third millennium and make a *new beginning,* maintaining hope requires a social analysis of the forces working against peace and the common good, creativity in searching for alternatives to help transform our world, along with a spirituality of resistance, and trusting confidence in God's gift of life.

Michel Andraos is a Ph.D candidate at the Toronto School of Theology working on the Theology of Peace.

[16] The poor and indigenous peoples of Chiapas said several years ago that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is a death sentence for their communities. The powerful economic elites of our countries continue to expand the free trade markets and preach 'prosperity and peace' while the indigenous and poor people in Chiapas and elsewhere continue to die as a result of these expansions.

[17] Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom*, Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976, pp. 88-89.

5

Ecology and Social Justice: Embracing a New Vision

Bruce Mackenzie

One of the most promising developments now underway is the convergence of social justice and environmental agendas. Scholars and activists are becoming increasingly aware of the systemic links between ecological devastation and forms of human oppression. This development is visible within both sets of movements; it is important also for theology, and for how we read and understand the bible. This paper reviews recent developments in social analysis, theology, and biblical studies reflecting this convergence, and explores their implications.

I. Ecology and the Left

In recent years a number of writers have pointed to a significant turning point in the history of the environmental movement, a water mark in its history and evolution. In Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor, Tom Athanasiou examines the links between economic globalization and the ecological crisis, and argues that the old environmentalism has reached its limits; it's time, he insists, for the green movement to move towards political maturity. And this maturity, and the future of the environmentalism as a whole, Athanasiou argues, depends on the ability of those in green movements to rethink traditional left issues -- "the global polarization of wealth, the need to regulate the market in general and planetary corporations in particular, ... an end to racism, and so on."[1]

Athanasiou suggests that environmentalism "has already shed much of its middle-class veneer," and insists that it must lose much more if it is to succeed. He argues that the "'social issues,' justice first among them, figure large in its future." There is a new awareness of class -- of the division of the between rich and poor -- as a fundamental ecological issue:

> In the South, and among poor peoples in the North, the demands of ecology and of community development are visibly converging. In the North, ecology threads through political questions of every variety: social justice, the drawdown of the military economy, the globalization of the economy, are all green issues.[2]

Similarly, Roger Gottlieb has pointed out that "our powers over nature have always been embedded in gender- and class-dominated societies in which hard labor, power, status, and wealth are unequally and unjustly distributed, and in which 'man made' (*sic*) poverty and exploitation have supplanted droughts or floods as the greatest threats to material well-being. While we may be told that humans controls nature, he argues, that control is ultimately vested in

[1] Tom Athanasiou, Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor. Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1996, 51.

[2] Athanasiou, 50.

ruling elites.[3] In a world of ruling elites and ideological mystification, he continues, "it is necessary to approach ecological devastation with an understanding of the distribution of social power that makes a small number of people initiate and - to an extreme degree - profit from it, and of the social constraints that lead the mass of people to accept it."[4]

Writers and activists have begun to see hope in the analysis of these issues and in the movements struggling around them. In particular, Gottlieb argues that the more spiritual forms of deep ecology and the left political tradition need each other's insights and sensitivities:

> They are, I believe, mutually necessary to help us learn how to manifest respect for human and non-human nature alike. Uniting their contributions could help mobilize a political response to the poisoning of our environment, and root that response in an encompassing spiritual framework that will alter the fundamental ways in which we think about politics, our own identity, and nature.[5]

II. Making Connections: A Question of Life

A central issue in these discussions of social equity and ecology is the issue of quality of life, or living conditions. A growing number of activists and thinkers perceive a direct connection between poverty, racism, and environmental quality. According to Thomas Hoyt, Jr. "communities that are poorer, less organized, and less politically influential become likely targets for the dumping of toxic wastes and other abuse from pollution."[6] Manning Marable suggests that a major report, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, "deepened awareness of the links among institutional racism, corporate greed and the environmental problems of the poor." This study found that three out of five African-Americans lived in communities with abandoned toxic-waste sites, and that blacks comprised higher percentages of the populations in urban areas with the highest number of toxic waste sites.[7]

Marable goes on to describe the consequences of "environmental racism." In Houston in the 1990s all of the city's landfills and six of the eight garbage incinerators were located inside the black community. This resulted, one sociologist reported, in "lower property values, accelerated physical deterioration, and disinvestment." Marable reports that the consequences of environmental racism were most clearly manifested in health care statistics. In Chicano farm

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[3] Roger S. Gottlieb, "Spiritual Deep Ecology and the Left: An Attempt At Reconciliation," This Sacred Earth, ed. Roger Gottlieb, New York: Routledge, 1996, 525.

[4] Gottlieb, 525.

[5] Gottlieb, 516.

[6] Hoyt Jr., Thomas L., "Environmental Justice and Black Theology of Liberating Community," in Theology for Earth Community, 166.

[7] Manning Marable, "Environmental Justice: The Power of Making Connections," in Theology for Earth Community, 57.

communities, where pesticides are abundantly used, childhood cancer rates are several times the national average. Because of urban air pollution, African-American young men are dying of asthma at three times the rate of white young men.[8]

Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, an environmental, health, and peace activist, also calls attention to the links between environmental quality and health: "in 1964 the World Health Organization stated that 80% of cancers were due to synthetic carcinogens. In 1979, the U.S. National Institute of Health Report stated that environmental factors were thought to be the major causes of most cancers."[9] Goldin Rosenberg cites high rates of cancer, rapidly declining sperm counts, and other immune deficiency and endocrine disruption conditions as problems which "mirror a growing trend of environmental contamination by synthetic chemicals, specifically those that are toxic, radioactive, persistent, bioaccumulative, and hormonally active." She notes a further link with the military when she points out that the military is the largest polluter and waster of resources in the world.[10] This suggests that militarism is also an integral part of a system producing both racism and ecological devastation.

In addition to health-related environmental injustices, there is "spatial environmental injustice." Michael Gelobter points out that inner-city communities of colour have lesser access to high-quality environments. Many low-income communities and communities of colour; the inner-city ghettos, are "among the most inhuman living environments ever designed or built." These neighborhoods Gelobter notes "are not only unpleasant to live in, they actively serve to enforce the oppression and psychological imprisonment of their residents."[11]

Ecology is related to social justice in other ways. Robert Kaplan calls the environment "the national-security issue of the early twenty-first century." The political and strategic impact of deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, and air pollution, will be "the core foreign-policy challenge from which most others will ultimately emanate." The environment, Kaplan argues, "is part of a terrifying array of problems that will define a new threat to our security."[12] Thomas Homer Dixon, head of the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Toronto has integrated military-conflict studies and the study of the physical environment. In

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[8] Marable, 57.

[9] Dorthy Golden Rosenberg, "Peace, Health and the Environment: Challenging a Conspiracy of Silence," Peace Magazine, November/ December, 1995, 25.

[10] Rosenberg, 26.

[11] Michael Gelobter, "Key Urban Environmental Justice Problems," in Theology for Earth Community, 162.

[12] Robert Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," Atlantic Monthly February, 1994, 58.

Homer-Dixon's view, future wars and civil violence will often arise from scarcities of resources such as water, crop land, forests, and fish.[13]

III. Theological Responses

One of the most promising developments within theology as we approach the third millennium is a new focus on "eco-justice." Eco-justice "refers to constructive human responses that concentrate on the link between ecological health and social justice. It refers to the dynamic intersection of economic and ecological well-being with the struggle for civil rights and social justice." Dieter Hessel, a leader of this movement, insists that the faithful response to eco-injustice "is to attend to both ecological integrity and social equity together - to seek the well being of human with otherkind."[14]

Theologians are attempting to articulate a theology that both "seeks to integrate the insights of environmentally sensitive behaviour within the framework of environmentally grounded values" and which "draws from social analysis and critique and builds upon a sense of justice informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition."[15]

In Redeeming the Time, Stephen Sharper sketches the outline for what he calls a "political theology of the environment." A political theology of the environment is one which "embraces the social, cultural, political, economic, and moral dimensions of the role of the human in light of the ecological crisis."[16] Scharper suggests that the asthma-afflicted children of the South Bronx and other examples of environmental racism are "testaments to the fact that the environmental crisis moves along the fault lines of social, economic, political, gendered, and racial oppression." He contends that cannot think of ecological destruction and human oppression of poor persons as separate and distinct phenomena. Both are "inextricably intertwined in a structure of sin." It is this systemic, structural evil that a political theology of the environment must address, Scharper argues, "if it is to speak credibly and constructively to our contemporary situation."[17]

In response to the dual crisis of increasing poverty and environmental devastation, liberation theologians such as Leonard Boff have begun to embrace a "social ecology" which seeks to

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[13] Kaplan, 59.

[14] Dieter T. Hessel, "Introduction," Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide, ed. Dieter T. Hessel, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, 12.

[15] Stephen Scharper, Redeeming the Time. A Political Theology of the Environment. New York: Continuum, 1997, 22.

[16] Stephen Scharper, 18.

[17] Stephen Scharper, 185.

study the relationships that a society establishes between its members and its institutions and between these and nature.[18] Boff notes that "[t]he same logic of the ruling system, based on profit and social manipulation, that leads to the exploitation of workers, also leads to the spoilation of entire nations and eventually to the depreciation of nature itself."[19] There is therefore a need for "a new paradigm that bypasses the mistakes of the old, that integrates all humans, not just the fortunate, in a benevolent manner, and that establishes more benign relationships with the environment. Hence, there is a need for a social ecology that outlines a social justice framework while acknowledging our part in a larger, holistic ecological dynamic.[20]

The Native American writer George Tinker has also argued that the two-fold problem of ecological and social justice is systemic in nature, and that we need more holistic and systemic solutions. Tinker also argues that theologians have been slow to respond to this need:

> [E]ven in those cases where we have begun to address specific cases of community well-being and eco-justice, we seem to do so with isolated strategies and a much too narrow focus. Especially at the level of theological education we have not yet begun to deal with eco-justice, let alone ethno-eco-justice and racism, as a systemic whole, as a system of oppression rooted in structures of power that touch every part of our lives. That is to say, not even our solutions are systemic enough to genuinely address the problem.[21]

The existence of "a system of oppression rooted in structures of power that touch every part of our lives" implies not only that our analysis of oppression must be systemic, but also that our vision of an alternative social order must be comprehensive, touching "every part of our lives."

Liberation, then, is not merely a matter of political and economic revolution; it is also a matter of profound cultural and religious renewal. It is a matter of the values and vision which inform efforts to create a new society. The connections described above are made in the context of these values and vision. Marable describes picking up trash on a state highway on Earth Day in 1970, and reflecting on what his effort had to do with racism. He notes that "the whole issue of the survival of the human species and the planet appealed to my holistic sense of politics, the necessity to create a vision of society which was non-antagonistic and non-threatening to societies of divergent cultures and conditions."[22] The connecting of black theology and the environmental movement entails that both movements broaden their scope. Marable describes

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[18] Leonardo Boff, "Social Ecology: Poverty and Misery," in Ecotheology: Voices from North to South, ed. David Hallman, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994, 237.

[19] Leonardo Boff, "Liberation Theology and Ecology: Alternative, Confrontation or Complementary?"in Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, vol.5 of Concilium, ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995, 66-67.

[20] Boff, 1994,

[21] Tinker, George E., "Eco-Justice and Justice: An American Indian Perspective," in Theology for Earth Community, 180.

[22] Marable, 155.

the necessity of "a more inclusive environmental movement," an environmentalism more relevant to the practical conditions of daily life experienced by people of colour. Similarly, there is a need for a more inclusive black theology, one which takes into account the environmental impacts on black communities.[23]

V. Social Justice and Ecology In Biblical Studies

Is there a biblical basis for an encompassing ecological and social vision? Diane Jacobson is one author who has examined several parts of the biblical tradition which link human life and justice with the well-being of the earth. She points to the covenant tradition as one expression of this connection. It is expressed through the covenant with God, Noah, and the earth in Genesis 8, where "God intimately links the promise to humanity with the promise to all creation," and in the eschatological covenants found in Hosea 2 and Jeremiah 31, where phenomena in the natural world are "linked both with God's promise and with God's covenantal demands for human justice."[24] What is emphasized, Jacobson points out, is that the world responds to the choices we make and the actions we take: "when we fail to live up to our calling and responsibilities to serve God and one another, when we fail to live justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God, then nature responds as a creation out of sync with its creatures."[25]

Gene McAfee describes the work of Terence E. Fretheim in this context, and his recognition of "the symbiotic relationship of the ethical order and the cosmic order held by most ancient societies." Fretheim explores the correspondences between the plagues and the Passover/sea crossing in Exodus to show how the biblical writer linked the ecological disasters of the plagues with the historical and political events of the deliverance from Egypt.[26] McAfee notes that "[i]n constructing such a unified worldview of the natural and the historical, the writer of the Exodus story presents a central tenant of biblical thinking: moral actions have natural consequences, and nature, therefore, was not the inert object of God's activity in the creation accounts of Genesis, but an integral component in Israel's ongoing historical existence with God."[27]

Wisdom literature also highlights the relationship of the ethical (human) order with the cosmic (natural) order. Wisdom scholars have noted that there is a central dialectic in wisdom literature between anthropology and cosmology, between justice and order. In Wisdom and Creation, Leo Perdue argues that creation theology and its correlative affirmation of providence

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[23] Marable, 158.

[24] Diane Jacobson, "Biblical Bases for Eco-Justice Ethics," in Theology for Earth Community, 49.

[25] Jacobson, 49.

[26] Jean McAfee, "Ecology and Biblical Studies," in Theology for Earth Community, 36

[27] McAfee, 36.

"were at the centre of the sages' understanding of God, the world, and humanity."[28] Wisdom scholarship recognizes that the personification of wisdom is the fundamental theological project of wisdom literature, its contribution to theology. The wisdom of God is personified as a woman and this is intimately linked to the creation of the world - that is, wisdom is behind or supports creation. This connection, Jacobson observes, "invites us to live our lives, both individually and societally, in accordance with the cosmic harmony and divine intention of creation." We are "invited to live wisely and to align ourselves with the very wisdom with which God created the world in order that it might go well with us and with the world."[29]

VI. Sabbath/ Jubilee Tradition

Jacobson also points to the Sabbath tradition as a part of biblical faith which links human destiny with the natural world, social justice with ecology. She points to the Sabbath tradition in Genesis, which is emphasized in Exodus, and expanded in Leviticus into the Jubilee tradition. She notes that Sabbath links social justice with creation in that all people - free and slave, Israelite and alien - as well as all animals are to partake in the pattern of Sabbath rest. "Such rest from labor," she notes, "is part of the fabric of harmonious creation."[30]

Another dimension of the Sabbath tradition and its connecting of the earth and human life is described by Jim Corbett, one of the founders of the Sanctuary Movement in the United States. Corbett's understanding of Sabbath begins with the observation that people in every culture in every age have turned to wilderness in search of life's fundamental meanings. Corbett notes that with the Israelites this search was expressed or experienced, not individually, but communally:

> [B]ecause the prophetic faith is rooted in a whole people's response to the revelation at Sinai, prophecy is primarily concerned with the community's revealed task rather than the individual's enlightenment. Israel goes out as fugitive slaves and is reborn in the desert as a covenant people. Out of Sinai's stillness the community hears itself called to complete its part of creation, to become a people that hallows the earth.[31]

Sabbatical times, Corbett observes, "are regularly recurring vantage points from which to remember and renew the community's covenant to actualize creation's goodness in human history."[32] He states that "as a time free from busyness and diversion - as a temporal analogue to untamed spaces -it was initially established to function as wilderness." Corbett reflects finally that "in seeing the great goodness of wildlands, we realize that the man-made (*sic*) world is

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[28] Leo G. Perdue, Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994, 20.

[29] Jacobson, 51.

[30] Jacobson, 48.

[31] Jim Corbett, Goatwalking, New York: Penguin Books, 1991, 83.

[32] Corbett, 84.

not-yet-good, that the earth's human dimension is still inharmonious and uncompleted."[33] Corbett concludes: Sabbath teaches "that we should regularly cease to busy ourselves with efforts to bend the world to our will." It teaches that "the man-made (*sic*) world must be brought into wholeness and harmony - into shalom - with the rest of creation." This is in contrast to a culture bent on destroying wilderness and wholly taming the earth, conquering, owning and consuming creation.[34]

Jacobson points out that in Leviticus 25 this notion of Sabbath rest is expanded further to Sabbath year and into the proclamation of Jubilee, "which brings into its purview the care and rest of the land."[35] Corbett, like Jacobson, reflects on the connections between human well-being and the well-being of the earth expressed in the Leviticus chapter:

> [d]uring the sabbath year all are to cease making their living agriculturally, supporting themselves instead from the land's spontaneous, uncultivated growth. Debts are to be cancelled and slaves are to be freed. Land ownership also reverts in the jubilee year; no one shall permanently subjugate the earth or another person.[36]

Redemption/ Hope

Theologian Thomas Berry insists that humanity and the earth will go into the future together, or not at all. The notion of one earth community - of human destiny linked to the natural world - is reflected in biblical discussions of redemption and hope. Jacobson argues that the promise of hope given to us through the biblical witness extends not just to humans but to all creation. She points out that "the human role in and with the natural world is for Christians... always understood in the context of salvation, promise, and hope."[37]

McAfee similarly argues that the natural world in one way or another comprises an essential component of redemption for biblical writers. Given that redemption is a complex concept which changes through the biblical writings, McAfee argues, redemption nonetheless provides a convenient context in which to explore the New Testament understanding of nature. For McAfee "the biblical understanding of creation as the foundation of righteousness and salvation implies a much broader understanding of creation than modern scholars have been prepared to recognize." He points out that "this broader understanding of creation involves, among other things, a new understanding of redemption." McAfee cites Frank Moore Cross's attempt to recover "the wholeness and unity of human and natural history...a comprehensiveness in which

[33] Corbett, 83.

[34] Corbett, 81.

[35] Jacobson, 48.

[36] Corbett, 83.

[37] Jacobson, 51.

the natural world is an actor that 'both engages and is transformed by the epic events' of biblical redemption." McAfee goes on to say that "this active involvement of nature in the epic drama of salvation - nature's fleeing the divine wrath, transfigured by the divine glory, redeemed in so far as humans are redeemed, damned insofar as they are damned - compels Cross to speak of the 'redemption of nature.'"[38]

Jacobson cites Romans 8 to point out that the promise of Christ is for the whole creation, that "humanity together with all creation, stands under the promise of redemption in Christ."[39] McAfee also cites Romans 8 (and 1 Corinthians 15) as the "epicentre of the idea of cosmic salvation." The starting point of the New Testament's theology of nature, according to McAfee, "is the apocalypticism which runs throughout the New Testament and has redemption at its core." McAfee observes that "Jesus's apocalypticism "was earth transforming in cosmic dimensions: the redeemer God is also the creator God."

McAfee cites Gordon Zerbe's examination of the Reign of God as a comprehensive conception in the New Testament of God's redemptive activity. Zerbe argues that it is an ecological concept because "the New Testament's vision for salvation includes the restorative re-creation of the entire universe - both human and nonhuman integrally - to its intended ecological balance," For Zerbe the New Testament salvation, expressed in the establishment of the Reign of God, entails the restoration of the entire universe to its original state, that is, the renewal of creation.[40]

McAfee notes that for Zerbe this vision of holistic redemption also "motivates Christian ethics- priorities for Christian action in the world - including stewardship of the natural world."[41] Jacobson similarly argues that the promise of redemption "is not a promise which absolves us of responsibility; rather, this promise undergirds the very hope which makes responsible living possible." Our role in and with the natural world, therefore, is understood in the context of salvation, promise, and hope.[42]

Bruce Mackenzie is a student at TST doing a masters in Theology, with a specialization in theology and ecology from the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology at St. Michael's College. He is also a campaign assistant with the Wildlands League chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, an environmental NGO.

[38] McAfee, 40.

[39] Jacobson, 53.

[40] McAfee, 40.

[41] McAfee, 40.

[42] Jacobson, 52.

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6

Returning to the Way of Blessing: Reflections on Jubilee and Ecology

Mark Hathaway

We live in a time of deep ecological crisis, the most severe of the Cenozoic era. Species are disappearing at a rate faster than at any time since the great cataclysm which wiped out the dinosaurs approximately 65 million years ago. The Earth's air, water, and soil have been contaminated by a host of chemicals which poison its capacity to sustain life. Forests and arable land are disappearing rapidly and our climate is warming at an unprecedented rate.

Perhaps most disturbing, this unfolding ecological catastrophe is the result of human activity, particularly the activity of the richest 20% or so of the world's people living in consumer societies. The crisis we have precipitated is so critical that a group of 1,600 scientist, including 102 Nobel prize laureates, issued a "Warning to Humanity" in 1992 stating that:

> No more than a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity immeasurably diminished. A new ethic is required—a new attitude towards discharging our responsibility for caring for ourselves and for the Earth. This ethic must motivate a great movement, convincing reluctant leaders and reluctant governments and reluctant peoples themselves to effect the needed changes. (Quoted in Brown, 1994, p. 19)

In the call for a new ethic, we hear echoes of the Jubilee call for a new beginning, for a return to right-relationship or *shalom*. What would a new beginning in our relationship with the Earth require? How can the teachings of Jubilee inspire us today to restore balance to the wider Earth community to which we belong?

To examine these questions, this paper will begin by looking at how the Biblical tradition and the theologies it has inspired may have actually contributed to the ethic of destruction currently wreaking havoc with the Earth's ecosystems. Then, it will look at how a re-reading of key biblical texts can contribute to a more ecologically harmonious understanding of God and the place of humanity in the wider Earth community. The paper will go on to examine the ecological wisdom of the Jubilee tradition and its respect for the Earth as a living subject. At the same time, it will explain how the Gaia hypothesis can help us understand the Earth's subjectivity in the light of modern science. Finally, all these insights will be drawn together to sketch how we can imagine a new ethic, a new covenant with the Earth and all its beings.

The Bible and Ecological Destruction

Many writers consider the Bible and Christian theology to be major contributing factors to the development of the ideology of domination and exploitation which has resulted in the destruction of both ecosystems and indigenous peoples. For example, the scientific and colonial exploits of "Christian" Europe and North America over the past five centuries have often claimed inspiration in the Genesis text commanding "man" to "subdue" the Earth and to have "dominion" over nature (Gen. 1:28).

At the same time, it is interesting to note that, until the end of the Middle Ages, Europe actually lived with an "organic" cosmology which saw all life as an inter-related web. While hierarchical, static, and conservative in nature, this cosmology did in fact lead to a fairly high

degree of ecological harmony for the peoples who lived it. Indeed, after the ecologically exploitative practices of the Roman empire (which led to widespread erosion and deforestation), Christian monasticism actually helped reintroduce a sustainable model of agriculture to Europe.

The Rise of Mechanistic, Reductionalistic Cosmology[1]

During the 17th and 18th centuries, however, a new cosmology began to supplant the organic understanding that had predominated Europe in different forms for thousands of years. At its heart lay the new discoveries of physicists like Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton and philosophers like Francis Bacon and René Descartes.

In the view of this cosmology, the universe is composed of matter which is considered essentially static and lifeless (composed of "building blocks" in the form of indivisible atoms). The motion of the planets and stars are predictable, resembling a giant, clockwork-like machine which has existed for all eternity. All phenomena can be seen and measured; that which cannot be perceived in such a way is considered illusory. Spirit (and any consideration of the divine) is therefore dismissed, ignored, or isolated to the personal or emotional realm. The real world is reduced to the world of the material.

In this cosmology, systems are understood as the sum of their constituent parts. By dividing the complex into the smaller and simpler, an understanding can be gained of the whole. This approach is essentially atomistic and reductionalist, because it reduces all systems (including the web of life) to discrete, unrelated components functioning together mechanically.

In the 19th century, the ideas of Darwinian evolution added another dimension: All forms of life are now seen as being involved in a never-ending competition for survival. Evolution is driven by dominance, the "survival of the fittest."

In sum, this cosmology gives human beings an absolute right to dominate, utilise, and, if necessary, destroy "inferior" forms of life and, indeed, the Earth itself. Instead of a living planet made up of a community of beings, the Earth is reduced to a storehouse of "resources" and "raw materials" to be disposed of as humans (particularly, male, European, rich humans) please. In essence, this is a fundamentally anthropocentric cosmology because other living beings are given value only to the extent that they are useful to humanity. This same a cosmology has been used to justify colonialism (including the destruction of indigenous peoples) and the competitive, exploitative dynamics of capitalism.

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[1] Much of the material in this sub-section is drawn from an unpublished paper entitled "Transformative Education: Awakening Humanity to the Challenge of the Global Crisis" by Mark Hathaway (1994).

The Bible, Theology, and Mechanistic Cosmology

To what extent did the Bible contribute to the formulation of this mechanistic, reductionalistic cosmology? Certainly it is not simple coincidence that this world view arose in a region where western Christianity had long dominated.

While an organic cosmology underlies the Bible itself, there can be little doubt that it is, by in large, an anthropocentric (and indeed, androcentric) text. That is, the Bible taken as a whole is very much centred on human beings (particularly, men and particularly, those of Israel) and their relationship with God. As Tom Hayden points out:

> The human condition is considered the primary focus of morality, while the tortured condition of nature serves only as background. Salvation has been promised to the individual, but not to other life forms on our planet. The Ten Commandments prohibit adultery but not pollution, demand that we honour our parents but not the earth. (1996, p. 2)

Subsequent interpretation of the Bible within Christianity (influenced by Greek philosophy) further contributed to an anthropocentric view of reality. As Hayden points out, we came to see God as an external creator who set the universe in motion. As a result, a dualism arose between mind/spirit and creation/matter (which later helped mechanism relegate spirituality to the personal, emotional sphere). A hierarchy of being also emerged, with human beings created in the image of God as the highest expression of the physical order. Thomas Aquinas wrote that "dumb plants and animals are naturally enslaved and accommodated to the uses of others..by a most just ordinance of the Creator" (Summa Theologica quoted in Hayden, 1996, p. 51).

Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992) notes several other theological developments which came to support the ideologies of domination and anthropocentrism. Over time, inspired in part from certain Biblical texts such as the conquests described in the book of Joshua, a dualistic conception of good and evil as reified opposites arose (p. 82-4). Evil was then seen as something to be "purified," often through violence. A distorted interpretation of apocalyptic texts reinforced this conception, often giving justification to those who saw themselves as the "elect" to impose their domination over others (such as indigenous peoples). This interpretation of apocalyticism also saw death as "the last enemy" to be conquered. "The very nature of the life of the biosphere, rooted in mortality and renewal through disintegration, is denied. Instead life and death are absolutised as opposites" (Ruether, 1992, p. 83). In such a vision, the Earth, nature, and the entire material realm are seen as an inferior reality, something divorced from God, something from which we wish to escape. The destruction of nature for the "higher good" of "human progress" therefore seems to have a nearly divine justification.

All of these ideas formed the backdrop against which the mechanistic model of science emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries. Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) used the imagery of the witch hunt to describe the scientific endeavour as placing nature on the rack, being "bound into service," and to be moulded and forced from "her" natural state. Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) saw the universe as a vast machine put into motion by the creator while René Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637) considered it to be humanity's destiny to be "masters and possessors of nature."

The Bible and the Ecological Perspective

The Bible itself, however, often presents a strong contrast to the dualistic theologies which served as a backdrop for the emergence of mechanism. Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992, p. 208-9) points out that God is commonly presented as one who relates very directly to nature, a creator-God who visits the Earth in the rain (Ps. 65), who speaks in the thunder (Ps. 29), and who provides for the wild animals (Job 38-9). Certainly the Bible does not present God as one who hates the Earth, but rather as one who rejoices in the work of creation (Prov. 8:22-31). This would seem to imply that humans, created in the image of the Creator, should likewise rejoice in preserving the health of creation.

Interestingly, Ruether points out that the Jubilee tradition stands in contrast to the distorted apocalyptic vision described previously:

> [The importance of the Jubilee laws] lies in providing a model of redemptive eco-justice. Unlike apocalyptic models of redemption, the Jubilee does not promise a 'once and for all' destruction of evil. Humans will drift into unjust relations between each other, they will overwork animals and exploit land. But this drift is not to be allowed to establish itself as a permanent 'order.' Rather, it is to be recognised as a disorder that must be corrected periodically, so that human society regains its right eco-social relationships and starts afresh. (1992, p. 213)

The Gospels also seem to place a high value on the Earth and the diverse beings who inhabit it. Jesus seems to have been in profound contact with the natural world around him. He taught using parables referring to seeds, growth, and harvest, to sparrows, fish, and trees. Every reference to Jesus praying in the Gospels portrays him doing so out of doors: In the hills overlooking the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum, on the mountain during the transfiguration, in the wilderness, or in the garden of Gethsemane. While Jesus doesn't seem to have explicitly spoken about care for the Earth, his entire life and way of teaching is imbued by the world of nature and respect for it.

Jesus' language, Aramaic, was itself strongly infused with images from nature and agriculture. The word used for evil in the Lord's prayer (bisha) connotes unripeness or rottenness, a fruit out of time, or an inappropriate action (Douglas-Klotz, 1990, p. 35). In contrast, the word used for "blessed are" in the Beatitudes (*tubwayhun*) can be translated as "ripe" (1995, p. 38). Blessing, then, is linked to the idea of fruitfulness, health, integration, and wholeness.

Reinterpreting the Genesis Creation Texts

While many of the Psalms, Job, the Jubilee texts, and the Gospels evidence belief in a God who cares for all the Earth, there is little doubt that the first chapters of Genesis have served as a basis for many who have tried to theological justify human domination of other creatures. Yet, two texts in the first chapters of Genesis can help us to gain a new appreciation for the biblical foundation for a deep respect for Earth. The first step is to revisit the passage so often used to justify the exploitation of nature, Genesis 1:28:

> And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the Earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth." (RSV)

Ruether (1992, p. 21) argues that, while this text is definitely anthropocentric in portraying humans as the "crown of creation," it certainly does not intend humans to have an "exploitative or destructive rule over Earth." God possesses the Earth, humans simply are given usufruct rights. We are meant to care for the Earth, not destroy it.

Neil Douglas-Klotz points out the Hebrew khibeshu, normally translated as "subdue":

> Refers to centralising and internalising (KHB) fire, heat, and light (ASH), thereby empowering something through the force of compression. This leads to the images of pushing or treading down with the feet. The images of feet and psychic movement are related to their evolution in the previous verses (24-26). That is, the ability of human consciousness to move with a greater amount of free will was here extended to include an ability to override its own subconscious self, instincts, and other interior abilities, which are a heritage from the interiority of older beings. (1995, 182)

Similarly, the word *freddou*, normally translated as "dominion":

> Points to a singular power to radiate diversity and differentiation, a power that spreads out, unfolds, and occupies space by it nature, that moves with firmness and perseveres in its own will. (1995, p. 162)

In both cases, the words can be understood as to portray creation entering a new phase as a new capacity is given to humans to exercise free will, to act consciously and make choices, to differentiate and diversify. All of these are a far cry from giving license to exploit and destroy. Instead, they seem to imply a strong sense of the responsibility which comes from participating with God's creative action..

Given this reading, we no longer have to read this Genesis text in an anthropocentric manner. Instead of being the "crown of creation," we can see ourselves in terms of a new stage dependent on all that has passed before (as indeed is presented in Genesis 1). Brian Swimme often speaks of humanity as the emerging consciousness (or perhaps, one aspect of the emerging consciousness) of the Earth. Instead of being over and above the rest of creation, we can understand this text in similar terms—as a new capacity given to our planet to act consciously and to create new possibilities.

Arthur Waskow (1997) suggests something along these lines in his commentary on the first part of chapter two in Genesis. He notes that the word used for "human," *adam* is intimately connected to the word used here for earth (soil), *adamah*. A good translation, therefore, for *adam* would be "Earthling" or "Earth-creature."

> "YHWH Creator shaped Earthling—dust—from the earth, and blew into s/he's nostrils the breath of life." *Adam* from *adamah*. Indeed, this is unique in the Creation story: no elephant, no beetle, no hawk or crab or pine tree, is formed from the earth. Only the "Earthling," the human, has that honour.
>
> Notice that "earth" here is not an "environment," because it is no "environs" for the human. It is not outside, separate, a wholly "other."—Instead, the *adam* is intertwined within *adamah*, and the *adamah* is deeply entwined in the *adam*. How could you disentangle them?

> Intertwined, yet distinct. The last letter/syllable of the name of earth, the "ahh" of *adamah*h, is the letter "Hey," the sound of breathing, the only letter that appears twice in God's Name—YHWH—which can only be pronounced (it has no vowels, whatever you have heard about "Jehovah" or "Yahweh") by simply breathing.
>
> Somehow God breathes this single letter, the "breath of life" from the living earth, into the Earthling's nostrils, so that s/he comes to live. The letter of the breathing, the "hey," vanishes from public visibility, vanishes from the Earthling's name, because it goes within: nostrils, lungs, blood, every inch of body. The breath becomes immanent, and therefore invisible, disappears.
>
> The last letter/syllable of the name of earth, the "ahh" of *adamah*h, is also the female ending for many Hebrew nouns. The "forming" of *adam* is a kind of birthing from the mother's womb, where the two had been profoundly intertwined—but it is different from an ordinary birthing. For here the new-born also continues to contain the mother, as if there is a series of "Chinese wombs" in which each contains the other in a larger and larger, deeper and deeper, way. (1997)

So, humanity is seen in Genesis as an expression of Earth. Indeed, we are in some way created in a way which makes us uniquely connected to the planet, formed from its very self as though we were Earth's children. We are Earth in which breath has become immanent. We are the Earth made conscious in a new way. We are not over and above, but rather a part of the Earth.

We are therefore called to live in a deep and conscious relationship with the Earth and its creative process. We are restored to our own humanity in our restoration to earthiness, in recognition that we are part of the great community of Earth. How can we change our current, largely exploitative, relationship with the Earth to one in which we see ourselves a deeply connected with all beings on this planet?

Jubilee as a Return to Right-Relationship

The tradition of Jubilee, in fact, provides us with a powerful vision for changing our relationship to the Earth and the web of life it nurtures. One way of understanding Jubilee is as renewal and re-balancing—a return to right-relationship. In the year of Jubilee, slaves are released, debts cancelled, families return to their ancestral lands, the soil rests from human cultivation, and all creatures partake in the bounty which God provides through nature. As a renewal of right-relationship, the spirit of Jubilee today calls us to heal the relationship which is etched into our very beings through billions of years of evolution, our relationship to the Earth.

The Earth as an Autonomous Being

Jewish theologian Arthur Waskow notes that, in the Jewish tradition, Leviticus 25 is "the most profound teaching of the holiness of Earth. For here the Earth as an autonomous being is entitled to rest, to repose, to reflect—the right to be, so as to pause from doing" (Waskow, 1997). He goes on to note that, while this is in part for the sake of human sustenance[2], at a more profound level rest

[2] "Is this for the sake of human sustenance? At one level, yes. For the Torah goes on to explain that if human beings, lacking a sense of security and trust in God, worry about where the next year's food will come from, they should understand that if they let the Earth rest then there will be a new and fertile harvest afterward." (Waskow, 1997)

is granted to the Earth for its own sake, because it deserves rest in the same way as we do. "The Earth has its own independent relationship with God, just as human beings, Earthlings, do."

Jubilee, then, invites us to give rest to the Earth as a being deserving both respect and care. Indeed, the text of Leviticus reminds us that "the land belongs to me, and to me you are only strangers and guests" (25:23).The Earth is not the possession of humanity, but rather a gift which God shares with us and all the other beings living on the planet. The Earth is not a storehouse of raw materials, but a living being who must be loved, respected, and nurtured for its own sake.

The Gaia Hypothesis and the Earth as Subject

In contemporary science, the Gaia hypothesis provides us with a new and profound way of understanding the Earth as a living being, as a subject. The cooperative dynamics of Earth are so powerful that the planet exhibits many of the characteristics of a unified living organism. James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis have actually demonstrated that our planet is a self-regulating whole that has been able to maintain temperature despite an increase of the sun's energy output by over 30% during the history of the Earth (Rifkin, 1991, pp. 259-60). Similarly, atmospheric composition has remained nearly constant in recent epochs, something of the utmost importance since even a small increase in the percentage of oxygen would cause spontaneous combustion to occur, while a decrease would endanger most life. The saline content of the oceans, too, has been maintained at nearly constant levels for the past 3.5 billion years, even though, theoretically, it could be expected to have risen by about 2000%. In many ways, then, the Earth functions as a single organism which has been named Gaia, after the ancient Greek goddess of the Earth (Sale, 1985, pp. 183-5).

The view of our incredibly beautiful planet from space certainly reinforces the idea of the Earth as a living being. While Lovelock and Margulis do not postulate a planetary mind, some scientists like Rupert Sheldrake (1990) do suggest that a "morphic field" might in some way guide the purposeful evolution of Earth. In many ways, this represents a return to the idea of an anima mundi or world soul which was common in the organic cosmology of the Middle Ages. Such an idea does not mean that the Earth itself is divine, but rather that it is a being with subjectivity in which the divine is immanent.

Some interpret the Gaia hypothesis as implying that Earth has such a strong, self-regulating dynamic that human intervention cannot destroy it: i.e. The Earth will be able to heal itself no matter what we do to it. A better understanding of both the Gaia hypothesis and of general systems theory, however, actually seem to imply otherwise: Beyond a certain point, intervention will provoke chaotic behaviour which can have completely unforeseen consequences. While Earth no doubt is quite resilient (as is evidenced by its ability to withstand the assault humanity has inflicted upon it,

particularly during the past few hundred years), great care must be taken not to interfere with complex dynamics which we hardly yet have begun to understand.

Indeed, the Gaia hypothesis can help humanity redefine its relationship to the Earth. We are an integral part of Gaia and we must love it as our own extended self. Yet, as Brian Swimme points out, we are also now a "macro-phase power:" i.e. Our powers are such that they can affect nearly every aspect of the life of the Earth. Unfortunately, we still have a "micro-phase mind" which thinks in terms of narrow individual or human communal survival. As (part, at least of) the emerging consciousness of Gaia, we need to assume a different role as protectors, nurturers, and sustainers of the life of Gaia—conscious at the same time of our own limitations in understanding the complexities of the web of life. We can be co-creators with God, but only if we first adopt an attitude of humility and of profound love for all life on our planet.

Jubilee and the Way of Blessing

Both the Jubilee and Sabbath texts call on humanity to trust in God's blessings and care manifest through the goodness of the Earth: "I have ordered my blessing to be on you every sixth year, which will therefore provide for you for three years" (25:21) and "The Sabbath of the land will itself feed you.".(25: 6).

The observance of the Jubilee is intimately related to living in the blessing of God. If the Sabbaths and Jubilee years are respected, God promises that "the land will give its fruit, you will eat your fill and live in security" (25:19). As Waskow notes, however, the opposite is also true: Leviticus 26:33-35, 43 warns that if the Earth is not given its due, it will "make up through desolation the years of Sabbath denied it." Waskow (1995) notes:

> The command to let the Earth rest is not simply a statement of what is pleasant, gracious, nice. Nor is it even a statement of what is just and equitable. It is a statement of necessity, the law of what just is. The Earth *will* rest. The only question is whether human beings and the Earth will rest together, in joy and happiness; or the Earth, denied rest and worked to exhaustion by humans who think they are its masters, will rest by expelling its human guests and smashing their societies, forcing them to leave the Earth alone so it can have a time of peace and quiet.

Enjoying God's blessings, then, is intimately linked to the practice of Jubilee, especially at an ecological level. Both Jubilee and Sabbath years allowed the natural order of the Earth to reassert itself and to heal. The sabbatical text in Exodus (23:10-11) speaks of wild animals feeding off the fallow fields. The fertility of the soil could regenerate itself naturally. The power of the Earth to sustain life for all was restored.

Today, the Earth cries out for rest as never before. The scale of human intervention in natural processes in biblical times was relatively small, yet provision was made to give the Earth its due. Today, we treat the Earth as though we were engaged in a giant liquidation sale, destroying its riches to accumulate lifeless capital for a tiny minority of humanity. Already, signs of impending disaster are at our door. Indeed—for many experimenting the ravages of soil erosion, depleted aquifers, felled forests, chemical and nuclear contamination, and climatic disaster—the Earth is already "making up through desolation" the rest and renewal it has been denied. The spirit of Jubilee

demands a time for ecological renewal on a scale to match the level of our destructive interventions. Can we imagine something sufficiently radical to meet the challenges we face?

Returning to the Way of Blessing: A New Covenant with the Earth

As a renewal of right relationship to the Earth, Jubilee invites us to return to the way of blessing into which we were formed when we were first shaped out of earth. In leaving behind our desire to dominate, exploit, and destroy the Earth, we can endeavour instead to restore the fruitfulness and health of our planet. To do so, however, will require much more than letting land lie fallow for a year. Countless sabbaticals have gone unobserved, and the Earth is already reclaiming by desolation the many years it has gone without rest. We have intervened in natural processes in ways never imagined in biblical times. We have destroyed entire ecosystems and continue to do so at an accelerating rate.

We must now enter into an extended time of Jubilee for the Earth. The work needed to restore the Earth to health will take many years, and perhaps centuries. It will require us to employ all our creativity and talents to heal what we have so grievously injured. A first step will be a profound change of heart on our part, seeing ourselves as member of a wider Earth community for whom we have a responsibility to care and nurture, not destroy. Certainly we must use the gifts of the Earth if we are to survive, but we must do so in a way that respects the ecological integrity of its web of life. We are also challenged to adopt a deep spiritual connection to the Earth, which in turn requires us seek God in the depths of creation itself.

Can we not imagine entering into a new covenant with the Earth and its beings? Just as God speaking to Noah entered into a covenant with every living creature (Gen. 9:8-17), we must commit ourselves as a species not to dominate or exploit the Earth for our own narrow gain. We must endeavour to put all our creativity at the service of the life and health of our planet. What if Christian churches were to make the promotion of such a covenant their highest priority? What if we were to work with all the different spiritual traditions call all of humanity to a new ethic, a new covenant with the Earth?

At the local level, a concrete way of living this covenant, this new ethic, would be for Christian communities to become actively involved in restoring the health of the Earth. A first step could be to "learn to be natives" of the places we live, finding out about its native plants and animals and how they interact to form an ecosystem. A second step could involve restoring a local watershed, creating a natural park, or starting organic gardens. Incorporating the symbols and rhythms of nature into our prayer, worship, and liturgies can also strengthen our connection to the Earth. Together, this renewal of our connection can serve as a foundation for changes in our lifestyles and action in campaigns aimed at challenging the powers which continue to destroy the beauty of our planet.

The task of healing the Earth's ecosystems is intimately linked to the Jubilee's call for a righting of relationship in the social order. The same exercise of power as domination oppresses both humans and the greater Earth community. The same economic system which excludes the vast majority of people also destroys the Earth.

Healing the intricate fabric of the web of life is essential if humanity is to live in the way of blessing. We cannot be integrated and whole if the Earth itself is not whole, for we are Earth-creatures. There can be no healthy social order without healthy ecosystems. The human community is part of the wider Earth community. The fullness of our humanity will be realised in our earthiness. By leaving behind the will to dominate, by softening ourselves within, we rediscover the true power of our nature as Earth-creatures. As the third beatitude reminds us:

Healthy and fruitful are those who have softened all that is rigid within;
they shall receive the strength of the Earth as their inheritance.
(Douglas-Klotz, 1990)

Mark Hathaway is the former Associate Director of Scarboro Missions' Justice and Peace Office. He presently runs Visioncraft Consulting which specializes in writing and facilitating workshops and retreats on Faith and Economics, and Ecology and Spirituality.

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7

A Resting Place for the Dove: Jubilee 2000 and Creation

Anthony J. Ricciuti
Earth Day, April 22, 1998

"The dove found no resting place for the sole of her feet."
(Genesis 8:9)

Do you know how to speak to the land, my brother?
Do you listen to what it tells you?
Can you take from it no more than what you need?
Can you keep its secrets to yourself?
Sell the land, my brother?
You might as well sell
The sun, the moon, the stars.
(Nancy Wood, from *Hollering Sun*, 1972)

The pretty cardinal perched on the parking lot sign was the first creature to wish me a Happy Easter upon my early dawn arrival at the church. His song was God's clarion call to a new day, a new season, a new life for our entombed world. It was a moment of glory on an otherwise sterile, asphalt sanctuary, proclaiming solidarity with the occasional tuft of grass making its debut through the cracks. But the invocation of that beautiful winged shofar was tentative, fragile, ephemeral. If only I could leave my car right here in the middle of the street I wouldn't risk disrupting worship in progress. Predictably, however, as I turned into the driveway the automatic gate lifted abruptly, startling the scarlet creature into flight... Damn!

The cardinal didn't have to leave on my account. But then, the sign upon which he was resting says clearly enough, ***"Parking for Church Activities Only."*** I stared at those words for several seconds before proceeding to my designated parking spot. They have come to symbolize the apartheid between human and nonhuman creation that undergirds centuries of abuse and exploitation of the latter by the former.

"Smart bird," I thought. "Well socialized into this anthropocentric world!"

And then I wondered if there will ever come a time when that precious ruby, and every other jewel in the nonhuman sphere, can rest secure in their rightful place in the diadem of creation along side the *anthropoi* who claim exclusive jurisdiction. The fierce competition among *adamim* for "parking space" in a shrinking *adamah* appears more and more to reduce such a scenario to *"an idle tale told by some women"* (Luke 24:11). Even on Easter it can be hard to imagine such an impossible possibility. Like the dove in the Genesis flood story searching in vain for a new creation, my hope, borne on the wings of the cardinal, returned to its fragile homeless shelter occupied by dwindling species adrift on a vast sea of human greed and indifference. African-American writer Alice Walker graphically describes Earth's homeless and humiliated status in the world...

> Some of us have become used to thinking that woman is the nigger of the world, that a person of color is the nigger of the world, that a poor person is the nigger of the world... But in truth, Earth itself has become the nigger of the world... While the Earth is 'a nigger' it has no choice but to think of us all as white men.
> (**Living by the Word**, p. 147)

Walker's characterization of the Earth's relationship to its human inhabitants may seem startling, exaggerated, and even offensive. But perhaps it takes a woman of colour to shock our awareness into recognizing a truth long ignored and even denied--that the Earth itself is in *"a state of bondage,"* as the New Testament puts it (Romans 8:21). It is not free to live and flourish according to God's creational intention. Hence, it has no choice but to view with mistrust, if not outright terror, its human overlords who have betrayed their divinely given mandate to cultivate and to care for the gifts which God freely gives and which the Earth abundantly brings forth. As long as the planet, which God made for *"all creatures great and small,"* remains enslaved by the imperialism and dominance of its most powerful tenant, that is, *homo sapiens* (sic!), then *"the dove [will find] no resting place for the sole of her feet."* It is the purpose of this essay, in the face of our present ecological crisis, to point to a source of vision and hope within the biblical Story that promises freedom and rest for *all* travellers, especially our nonhuman fellow passengers, aboard the fragile Ark called Earth. The Bible's program for this vision is called ***Jubilee***. It holds out hope for a sabbatical of liberation and rest for the Earth itself as it does for human persons. Jubilee is a divine guarantee that *every creature* will be free, even *"the ants [who] are a people without strength... and the badgers [who] are a people without power... and the locusts [who] have no king... The lizard [will dwell] in a king's palace"* (Proverbs 30:24-28). All creation will be free. No one will ever again be called *"nigger."* To this Jubilee promise we now turn.

I

The written legislation that joins and qualifies the Sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee is found in Leviticus 25, with parallels in Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and Exodus 23:10-12. It appears in the form of a series of concentric circles: the seven-day cycle, the seven-year cycle, and the seven-times-seven-year cycle. In each successive cycle, land (*ha-erez*), animals and humans are to rest and be restored, in deeper and more thoroughgoing ways, culminating, as Rosemary Radford Ruether puts it, in a "permanent revolution" in the fiftieth year.[1] While it is clear, as Ched Myers points out, that Levitical Sabbath legislation was not offered as an unattainable ideal but as a practical hedge against the inevitability of the stratification of wealth and power within human societies,[2] it is equally clear that the economic and political program of the Jubilee tradition is built upon the practice of Sabbath for the land. The preamble to the laws which mandate the deconstruction of debt, land alienation and bond servitude actually has Yahweh saying to Moses on Mount Sinai, *"When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the Lord"* (Lev. 25:1-2). There is a mandate to set at liberty all who have been made beholden--women, slaves, animals both wild and domestic, foreigners. The indebtedness of all is to be forgiven, but the wholeness of creation, including human life, is restored first by allowing the ground under our feet to rest and recover. A Sabbath for the land is the starting point of forgiveness...

[1] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing,* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 211.

[2] Ched Myers, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?,* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 166.

> For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield,
> but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that
> the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild
> animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard
> and with your olive orchard. Six days you shall do your work,
> but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and
> your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and
> the resident alien may be refreshed. (Exodus 23: 10-12)

The simple logic of this text says that the only way to insure long-term sustainability is to give the land a periodic rest. If the land is overworked and exhausted, then ultimately the people will not have enough to eat. And if the human community doesn't exercise some restraint in consumption, then there will be no food (or habitat) left for the wild animals. Likewise a farmer's workforce will collapse and die. The irony of consumerism (or of any *'ism'* for that matter) is that it usually achieves the opposite of what it sets out to achieve. Hence the Jubilee tradition not only includes the land in its promises of restoration; it makes the radical claim that rest for the Earth is the *starting point* of renewal for *everyone*! Professor Maria Harris points to the progression within the practice of Jubilee's core teaching which begins with a Sabbath for the land:

> You shall let the land lie fallow, that is, you shall practice Sabbath;
> You shall forgive debts, that is, you shall practice community;
> You shall set the captives free, that is, you shall practice liberation;
> You shall find out what belongs to whom and give it back, that is,
> you shall practice justice;
> You shall hold a great feast, that is, you shall sing the canticle "Jubilate"![3]

On this matter of the primacy of the land in Jubilee theology, I find it significant that the Genesis story of the flood, which is the source of the title of this essay, gives no details about how life aboard the ark was managed under severe conditions of confinement and deprivation. The text reflects no concern with such questions as "How were scarce resources allocated within the limited biosphere?" or "What political arrangements guaranteed equal justice for all species represented?" or "How did Noah insure harmony for the racial/ethnic diversity of his passengers?" The point of the narrative is with something more fundamental--Yahweh's covenantal promise for the Earth:

> Never again will I curse the ground because of humankind...
> As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest,
> cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease...
> I am establishing my covenant with you [Noah] and your descendants
> and with every living creature that is with you... Never again will there
> be a flood to destroy the earth... (cf. Genesis 8:21- 9:17)

The Jubilee tradition invokes this covenantal promise for the Earth and reminds humankind that our *"evil inclinations"* (8:21), which caused God to impose severe judgement upon creation, must never again prevail.

It is, of course, no secret that Jubilee practices have been largely ignored both in ecclesiastical teaching and in societal observance. To be sure, we can point to certain major historical moments that have witnessed the codification of one or more of the Jubilee mandates, such as the abolition of slavery in the West or the advent of women's suffrage; and from time to time

[3] Maria Harris, *Proclaim Jubilee!,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) pp. 2 f.

there emerges modest attempts to re-embody this ancient tradition in a contemporary *Sitz im Leben*, such as the current "**Jubilee 2000**" initiative which seeks the forgiveness of Third World debt by the end of the millennium. Nevertheless, the dove is still looking for a place to rest. The fact remains that the Earth is the last *"nigger"* to be emancipated. I attribute this sorry state of affairs, at least in part, to an inadequate theology of creation that has prevailed in the church. Theology *(theos + logos)* is understood conventionally as both divine and human conversation. It is a dialogue between God's word and human words. (For most of Christian history, however, the human words have been white, Western, male words!). Nonhuman partners have been silenced or ignored. The silence has become deafening in the last two hundred years since liberal theology has withdrawn from the cosmos and left it to science. Theology has turned instead to history, and has regarded creation only as prologue to the real stuff of religion which is the historical human drama. Furthermore, we have been satisfied with a kind of worldview, borrowed from the ancient Greeks, that sees everything in a pyramid with God at the pinnacle and other realities under God in descending order:

men
women
children

"higher" animals
"lower" animals
plants
insects
reptiles
snakes (yuck!)

Meanwhile, because of our neglect (or perhaps by our design), a split occurred in the relationship between human and nonhuman creation. The Enlightenment crystallized all non-rational, especially all nonhuman, realities into objects of "nature." We still talk about nature as if humans are not part of nature, are not "natural." Creation is an object commodified and commercialized rather than a living organism. The Earth, like women, children and slaves, is colonized, subjugated, penetrated, raped. The sacredness of the Earth is lost, trampled, violated. The sign in our parking lot has been very effective: only human "Cardinals" have been allowed to participate in our church activities!

But this historical ground is beginning to shift. An emerging biblical hermeneutic now recognizes the violence against the Earth that has been permitted by the absence of a credible theology of creation, and acknowledges that traditional interpretations have handled creation largely through neglect or misreading. There is a growing library of scholarly work that seeks, in Terence Fretheim's words, *"the reclamation of creation"* as a foundational datum of theology.[4] This work

[4] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation," *Interpretation 45* (1991) 354-365. See also his article "Nature's Praise of God in the Psalms," *Ex Auditu* III (1987) 16-30. Among other major monographs and articles to appear in recent years are Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), esp. chaps. 4 & 17; Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Steve Kraftchick, "Paul's Use of Creation Themes: A Test of Romans 1-8," *Ex Auditu* III (1987), 72-87; Susan Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation,* (Chico, California: Scholars Press,

attempts to nurture a unifying perspective on the world which brings together God, human and nonhuman realities in an interconnected whole. Its relevance and helpfulness, I believe, rest in several initiatives. First, this new reading of the texts restores the centrality of creation themes in the biblical narrative. Second, it understands that the fundamental experience of the people of God is writ large in those themes.[5] Third, this emerging theology of creation attends to the symbiotic relationship between ethical order and creation order. We shall return to illustrations of these points below.[6] Here I wish to point in particular to Walter Brueggemann's summary of the threefold biblical pattern of Yahweh's partnership with creation. Creation is (a), formed to be a blessing; (b), relinquished to the power of chaos and curse when human agents, charged with the well-being of the world, renege on their care taking responsibility; and (c), imagined in newness according to Yahweh's indomitable resolve and humanity's faithful cooperation.[7] Brueggemann's formulation follows the classic pattern, Creation--Fall-- Redemption or New Creation, but differs significantly from conventional theological discourse in that creation is not left behind after Genesis 2 or replaced by the human story for the rest of the journey. Rather, creation's story is entwined with human history. Creation too "suffers under Pontius Pilate," and the domination of exploitative regimes.[8] And in the end, creation will rise and "sit at the right hand of God" in unimaginable newness to provide healing for the nations.[9]

II

One question following from these new developments in biblical is, what would a Jubilee for creation look like? Building upon the work cited above, I would like, however, to proceed in a slightly different order from that of Brueggemann. I shall not start where the classic paradigm starts, that is, *"in the beginning,"* with the Genesis account of creation, even though that account contains the blueprint for humanity's ethical response, and the *raison d'etre* of the Jubilee tradition. I prefer, instead, to begin with those texts which give creation an opportunity to speak for itself. I do so for many reasons which will form the substance of the ensuing discussion. For the moment, I offer two considerations. First, I believe it to be a matter of simple justice to make room in the centre of the circle for those who have been forced to spend their entire existence at the margins. From the centre creation speaks and can be heard. When it is at the margins, creation is distant and inaudible. At the centre creation is the subject of the text. On the margins it is *talked about.* Moreover, from a distance *homo sapiens* can imagine that what he hears is her romantic "whisper through the pines," confirming that all is well with his hegemony. But up close and personal he

1985); Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).

[5] Compare, for example, the vicissitudes of Israel's faith with the cycles of land acquisition and land loss in Israel's history. See Walter Breggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

[6] See below, pp. 10-11.

[7] *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 555.

[8] A good case in point is the story of the building of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6-9). It took 13 years to build and almost exhausted the land of its natural resources. Indeed, the entire monarchial narrative unfolds its tales of abusive royal power bringing unrelenting suffering to Israel and the land (2 Samuel 12, 1 Kings 21).

[9] Cf. Revelation 22:1-5, within the context of my discussion below, p. 11-12.

may in fact hear disquieting *"sighs too deep for words,"* or the uncomfortable *"groanings in labour pains"* (Romans 8:22,26) which herald new beginnings he hadn't planned!

The second consideration behind my reordering of the traditional paradigm of theological discourse on creation has to do with the emphasis resulting from the canonical arrangement of the texts. Terence Fretheim is surely justified in insisting that

> Genesis does come before Exodus...Priority of place is given to God's actions in the world, rather than to human knowledge of what God has done... [10]

But he observes that the canonical ordering has seldom been important, let alone decisive, for the way in which the Old Testament has been interpreted in modern times:

> The usual attempt to begin reading the Old Testament from the perspective of Exodus rather than Genesis seems to be grounded primarily in the centrality of the category of revelation in modern theology...[11]

Fretheim seeks to reinstate creation in its rightful place at the centre of the circle of theological discourse, a project to which he attaches no small degree of urgency. However, I wish to suggest that there may be another important reason for reading Genesis through the eyes of Exodus. It is not to reduce the primacy of creation, but to turn the spotlight on the abuse that God's good Earth has suffered through human political and economic domination, in order to emphasize Earth's need of liberation. Exodus is not only about revelation and law, but also about freedom from slavery, and the birth of *"God's people"* out of a *"not-a-people"* (1 Peter 2:10). Indeed, we know that the creation account in Genesis 1, attributed to the Priestly source, was written by exiles of another captivity who sought to rebuild their faith and hope in a God whose creational intention for them was life-giving and liberating, even as they faced the daily assaults of their death-dealing captors. In other words, in order to articulate what a Jubilee for creation would look like, we need to assume a fresh, viable theology that entwines creation *and* liberation together, for *"the creation has been subjected to futility"* and *"eagerly awaits its liberation from the bondage of decay"* (Romans 8: 20,21). To do this, we might have to consider a reading of the Story that, for the moment at least, departs from the canonical ordering of the text.

III

Hence, I shall now proceed with such an articulation by following what I will call the "grammar of liberation." Such a syntax reverses the word order of the sentence and begins with the object of the verb, thereby setting it free to become a subject. So we have, then, not

[10] "The Reclamation of Creation," *Interpretation* 45 (1991), p. 356.

[11] Ibid., p. 354.

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...
>
> but
>
> The heavens are telling the glory of God,
> and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.
> Day to day pours forth speech,
> and night to night declares knowledge...
> (Psalm 19:1-2)

In this articulation, the heavens which God created by a word and which humans have objectified, now become a declarative subject in their own right, proclaiming God's glory to the widest horizon of existence. The dome which God set in the sky to separate and differentiate "the waters from the waters" is not some kind of prosthetic object upon which the cosmic foundations are made firm; rather, it is a witness, more precisely a subject-bearing-witness, to Yahweh's artisanship. Likewise, the day is not an empty object but a voluble speaker. Nor is the night inert; it works overtime to teach. In such a grammatical reconstruction, *creation has her Jubilee, first and fundamentally, in the restoration of her subjectivity.*[12] Jubilee returns to nonhuman creation that which modernity has stolen from her. The fundamental difference between ancient and modern thought regarding the surrounding world is that for moderns the phenomenal world is primarily an 'It'; for the ancients it is a 'Thou.' A restored subjectivity returns to creation her "Thou-ness," which is the power to act in relationship. Thus, creation is free from the bondage that only acts exploitatively and destructively upon her. Creation is free to give and to receive; she is free from the threat of being taken. She is free, in other words, from the bondage of instrumental worth, and renewed instead in her intrinsic value. By this I mean that a forest, for example, is free from the bondage of a single destiny in a furniture factory, or worse, the threat of annihilation for a parking lot. Jubilee restores to all nonhuman species, as it does to *homo sapiens*, a value that is intrinsic to their claim of partnership with God and to their creational purpose within a living and generative ecosystem.

Second, to say that nonhuman creation has a subjectivity within an I-Thou relationship is toaffirm that, among other things, ***every*** *species on the planet has a voice and a response-ability.*[13]

[12] A reading that returns subjectivity to nonhuman creation does not do so by turning God into an object. Such a reversal would be idolatrous, and strongly precluded by God's sovereignty. It is rather the case, I think, that Jubilee restores creation to its original status of inter-subjectivity with the Creator and co-subjectivity with humanity.

[13] I have not attempted here to address certain philosophical questions inherent in the concept of nonhuman, responsive subjectivity, e.g., questions of agency, will, volition, intentionality, or selfhood. I find our Western tradition's inordinate emphasis on the *individual* self at the expense of other modes of self which can be seen in nonhuman beings not only arrogant and exaggerated, but also too complex to explain within the limited space of these pages. For a brief but excellent treatment of these and other related questions, see Brian J. Walsh, Marianne B. Karsh, Nik Ansell, "Trees, Forestry, and the Responsiveness of Creation," in *This Sacred Earth,* Roger Gottlieb, ed., (New York: Routlege, 1996), 423-435. The following quotation summarizes my point succinctly:

> To say, as the Bible does, that trees praise, sing, clap, and rejoice is to say that trees, *as trees,* in their whole physical, chemical, spatial, biotic functioning

The Earth itself is a symphony of evocative sounds:

> Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
> .....
> Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
> Let the floods clap their hands;
> Let the hills sing together with joy
> in the presence of the Lord... (Psalm 98:4 ff.)

Jubilee invites *all* voices into the conversation that expresses relationship to God. Theology then, in its fullest articulation, is the grateful response of *every* creaturely utterance for the One who *"judges the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity"* (Ps. 98:9). The land is no longer a silent member of the triad. For Yahweh has invested with the power of speech this newly ordered world in which there is no human monopoly. The invitation of Psalm 98 (cf. verses 5,6 and Isaiah 42:10-12) is given to the Earth *and* all peoples to join together in a praise that is universal. Moreover, creation's response is not limited to the role of a choir in worship. The whole gamut of experience is included. The earth quakes and the heavens rain down (Ps. 68:8); the sea looks and flees and the mountains and hills skip like young animals (Ps. 114:3-7); the cedars are broken and the oaks whirl (Ps. 29:5-9); the mountains melt like wax (Ps. 97:5); the waters are afraid and the deep trembles (Ps. 77:16); the land also grieves (Hosea 4:3); it even vomits its inhabitants because of their many sins (Leviticus 18:28). These behaviours are not anthropomorphisms; they are, rather, the active responses of nonhuman subjectivity in the Jubilee grammar of liberation.

A third consequence of the subjugated's becoming subjects in Jubilee practice is that *victims become a source of wisdom in theological discourse.* Consider the following text from the Book of Job:

> But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
> the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
> ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
> and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
> Who among all these does not know
> that the hand of the Lord has done this?
> In God's hand is the life of every living thing
> and the breath of every human being. (12:7-10)

Job's friends were convinced that they understood the reasons for his suffering, and equally certain they understood its meaning. But Job himself was struggling within a different way of knowing. Hugo Assmann, a Brazilian theologian whose concern for the poor led to his political exile, has coined a startling expression, *"the epistemological privilege of the oppressed."* [14] Such an epistemology yields insights unimaginable to those who feel secure in their power. No one can

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can fully respond to their Creator when that functioning is uninhibited and free. To say that the trees groan is to say that trees experience and respond to conditions of human abuse or neglect that inhibit and close down their responsiveness. In this way, metaphors of praising and groaning enable us to "hear" what the trees have to "say." (p. 432)

[14] Quoted in Robert McAfee Brown, *Theology in a New Key,* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 61.

hear the pain of victims quite like other victims. The oppressed have a way of knowing that is born in the cradle of suffering. The unemployed, for example, will interpret the achievements of a nation's economy quite differently from corporate CEOs. Those who dispose of toxic wastes in someone else's back yard think they can ignore the lethal consequences. But their victims know precisely what's causing their cancer. The victims have wisdom about environmental racism. They understand what happens when toxic wastes are dumped on the living space of the powerless. Likewise, animals and plants, the birds and the fish--they all know where it's safe to place their feet, and where it's not.

> Do you know how to listen to the land, my brother?
> Do you listen to what it tells you?

I am not arguing for a kind of pantheism or naturalism. Creation does not embody the Creator. Job was clear about that. In his anguished search for answers he pressed unrelentingly for a private audience with Yahweh, not with a Douglas Fir! But the point is that in his misery, Job was able to recognize, in a way that his friends failed to see, that the Earth and its creatures who experience suffering as he did have a wisdom to *"proclaim,"* and *"teach"*-- that is, the birds and the fish, the spotted owls and the dwindling schools of cod have an *"epistemological privilege"* that is typically undervalued by other partners at the common table of our theological discourse. They are willing to share their truth with us if we are willing to include them in the circle. When humans in our suffering open ourselves to the suffering of others, especially to the suffering of our marginalized, objectified nonhuman seat mates, then there is revealed to us a truth that leads every creature of God to freedom and Sabbath rest. This is a radical pedagogy indeed!

So far we have spoken only of creation's positive responses when her subjectivity is listened into speech. What saves the conversation from romanticism and sentimentality is the reality that *when nonhuman creation is prohibited from speaking she takes revenge.* This is a fourth, and from a human point of view least welcome, Jubilee promise. An interesting text to ponder in this regard is the story of Jonah, whose disobedience to a divine mandate landed him-- where else?-- in the belly of *"a great fish."*

> I called to the Lord out of my distress,
> and he answered me;
> out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
> and you heard my voice.
> [*The starting point of theology!]*
> The waters closed in over me;
> the deep surrounded me;
> weeds were wrapped around my neck
> at the root of the mountains. (Jonah 2:1-6)

When we insist on expanding a suburb atop an unstable sand cliff overlooking the Pacific; when we build our dream home on a flood plain; when we pave over the last and best southern Ontario farmland; when we slash and burn the Amazon rain forest, or over fish the "inexhaustible" Grand Banks--when we do any of these things against the wisdom of creation's laws, and fail to heed creation's warnings, then we ought not be surprised when *"the waters close in over us and the weeds wrap around our necks,"* when we experience climate changes, ozone depletion, drought

where there is usually rain, and floods in normally arid places, when there are food shortages and high prices. Surely creation's fury is justified.[15]

Three additional texts illuminate creation's capacity for a negative response: Hosea 4:1-3; Exodus 1-15; Romans 8. All of these texts affirm a symbiotic relationship between ethical order and creation order, a direct connection between human conduct and the welfare of creation.

The first text reads as follows:

> There is no faithfulness or loyalty;
> and no knowledge of God in the land.
> Swearing, lying, and murder,
> and stealing and adultery break out;
> bloodshed follows bloodshed.
> Therefore, the land mourns,
> and all who live in it languish;
> together with the wild animals
> and the birds of the air,
> even the fish of the sea are perishing. (Hos. 4:1-3)

Walter Brueggemann points out that the failure of creation is the outcome of Israel's disobedience, at the cost of life to the wild animals, birds, and fish. The violations of covenant are quite serious: swearing, lying, stealing, murder, adultery. The consequence of these actions is that the land grieves, and its inhabitants are (literally) *"enfeebled."* It is common to conclude that the words *"mourn"* and *"languish"* refer to a drought. The second half of the verse, however, expands the consequences: the animals, birds, and fish are *"gathered away"*-- that is, they disappear.[16] The term *'eres* permits reading either "land" (in this case the land of Israel) or "earth," that is, the whole of creation. We cannot determine which is intended, but it may indeed be preferable to read "land" in verses 1-2, which concern the conduct of Israel, and "earth" in verse 3. If that is the case, then the abuse of *'eres* locally leads to the death of *'eres* cosmically.[17]

About the second text, Exodus 1-15, Terence Fretheim has written a fascinating study entitled *"The plagues as ecological signs of historical disaster."*[18] Fretheim studies the distinctive role played by pharaoh who, as the familiar historical character in the narrative, enacts policies that produce a deep disruption of creation. That is, the plagues are not natural acts that concern Israel; they are "hypernatural" occurrences, whereby pharaoh is presented as a *mythic* force that disrupts the generativity of creation and draws Yahweh's retaliatory punishment. This account of plagues is, then, not a sentimental appeal to a kind of "back to nature" movement. It is hard-nosed look at realities that the dove and the cardinal live with daily in these closing years of the twentieth century. If only we would pay heed!

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[15] Cf. Leviticus 18:28 which warns that the land will "vomit" its inhabitants because of their many sins.

[16] See Walter Brueggemann, "The Uninflected *Therefore* of Hosea 4:1-3," in *Reading from This Place*, Vol. I (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 231-249.

[17] Ibid, p. 241 For a longer discussion, see Brueggemann, *The Land*.

[18] *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110/3 (1991), 385-96.

Finally, we come to a pericope which has been alluded to throughout this essay, the epistle to the Romans, chapter 8. For analysis of this text, I am indebted to Steve Kraftchick.[19] He observes that when Paul speaks about creation, he does so sparingly and indirectly. Seven of the references are in Romans, most of them in chapter 8:

> 8:17 During the present time we suffer along with the creation.
> 8:19 The creation awaits the revealing of the children of God.
> 8:20 The creation has been subjected to futility.
> 8:21 The creation is in a state of bondage and decay.
> 8:21 The creation will be released from this bondage to obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.
> 8:22 The creation groans in travail.

Linking chapter 8 to chapter 1, Kraftchick outlines Paul's argument that the history of creation and the human are intertwined so closely that redemption necessarily includes both. In chapter 1 the action of God in creation was intended to affect humans positively, but it did not. In chapter 8, Paul argues that it will be the action of God directed to humans which affects the creation. Further in chapter 1 Paul maintains that humans sought autonomy and so creation was reduced to slavery. Then in chapter 8 he states that the restored human is one who exercises right rule, a recognition that leads directly to creation's freedom. The major theme here is that as humanity goes, so goes creation, for creation was placed under the *"dominion"* of humans (Psalm 8), so that with right rule may come glory and freedom for all species. The conclusion is a call for a response at once ethical and hope-full:

> To live with a sober sense of our solidarity with creation requires of us a decision to live in hope for the resolution of all things in a just way... To await the fulfillment of God's justice requires of us hope in the midst of suffering...[20]

Hope in the midst of suffering prepares us for Jubilee's final victory *when every cosmological force that would derail history and destroy creation will be conquered in God's "great revolution"* of the fiftieth year. In this connection, a good biblical paradigm of the Sabbath of Sabbaths is Revelation 22:1-5. Here is a text that points not so much to the end of history as to the end of domination *in* history:

> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb through the middle of the streets of the city. On either side of the river, is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him... And there will be no more night... for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Rev. 22:1-5)

The water of life in this final scenario is not the raging flood of humanity's breach of covenant with God, as in the days of Noah, inundating the world and all but annihilating the entire creation. Here the water is redemptive. Its source is history's archetypal victim, "the Lamb." It

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[19] Steve Kraftchick, "Paul's Use of Creation Themes: A Test of Romans 1-8," *Ex Auditu,* Vol. III, 1987, pp. 72-87.

[20] Ibid., p. 87.

brings life out of death, inverting the sorry pattern of death out of disobedience. It flows through the middle of the street, not like a sewer, but like a spring that is pure, not a curse, but a blessing. On either side of the river is the tree of life. Creation becomes cruciform as well, participating as a suffering servant with the Lamb, and as a partner in the healing and feeding of the nations. There will be no more darkness, as with the *tohu wa-vohu* prior to the first day of creation, and no mighty empire will roll back the clock to pre-dawn chaos, as Pharaoh almost succeeded in doing (Exodus 10:21-24), for the mighty have been put down from their thrones and those of no account have been lifted up. The Lord God will be their light according to God's first creative utterance which has never been silenced. The objectified have regained their subjectivity and will reign for ever and ever. God's great reversal. ***Jubilate!*** Perhaps now the dove and all her progeny can return home *safely*, as sharers of shalom, and as harbingers of our abiding health.

To summarize, in the preceding pages I have addressed the question of a Jubilee for creation:

a) Nonhuman species, as well as the Earth herself, will be given back their subjectivity, together with the power to speak and to respond.
b) This response-ability will speak with a wisdom that comes from a different way of knowing, an epistemology that has been forged in the fires of oppression.
c) Jubilee points to the interdependence of the moral order and the created order which holds human beings accountable, since creation takes revenge whenever her voice is either nullified or ignored.
d) Jubilee means the end of domination *in* history and the participation of nonhuman species as partners with God in the healing of the nations.

IV

The grammar of liberation which started at the end of our Jubilee sentence now returns us to the beginning. After hearing creation speak with her own voice, and opening ourselves to her wisdom and her fury, perhaps we are better equipped to consider our own responsibility more concretely. The template of our calling is given in Genesis 1:27-30. With a consideration of this familiar text we shall conclude our discussion.

> So God created humankind in his image,
> in the image of God he created them;
> male and female he created them.
> God blessed them, and God said to them,
> "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth
> and subdue it; and have dominion over
> the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air,
> and over every living thing that moves
> upon the earth. God said, "See, I have given you
> every plant yielding seed that is upon the face
> of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its
> fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every
> beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air,
> and to everything that creeps on the earth,
> everything that has the breath of life, I have
> given every green plant for food." And it was so.
> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed,
> it was very good. And there was evening and
> there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1: 27-30)

The text begins with a bold brush stroke that paints humanity in rich royal colours after the image of the Creator--a portrait that was commissioned by Israel's exilic priests in the grimy studios

of Babylon.[21] It affirms the goodness of humanity amidst the beauty of all God's spectacular work. Human and nonhuman species receive the same evaluation, which should not surprise us anymore since we have heard nature's stunning, articulate wisdom. The narrative commands the man and the woman to *"have dominion over [the created order] (**rada**), to fill the earth and subdue it (**kabas**)..."* It is true that these verbs have a violent meaning in other contexts.[22] But the violence does not appear in this context, where, according to the Priestly story, human dominion is to be exercised in a situation of peace and harmony. The violence is mitigated as we hear one another into speech. And conversation flows more naturally now since animals and humans concelebrate their intersubjectivity around the same table upon which the Creator has set our common food. Jubilee has taught us that *"dominion"* has nothing to do with control and manipulation, and everything to do with *"going down"* into a garden to cultivate it and care for it (Genesis 2:5,15). Our *"dominion"* is a partnership of symbiosis and solidarity with God and with all creation at the service of life and creativity. It will be a dominion of guardianship, preservation and consummation of every creature's gifts. Neither a naturalistic ecologism is called for, since we are one family of many members whose role is mutual nurture and healing, nor a despotic rule devoid of mutuality, since the purpose of the divine charge is to lead us all to God, our ultimate home, our final liberation. Wisdom, righteousness and generosity are what is required, as it was in the beginning, is now, and evermore shall be, world without end...***Jubilate!***

Anthony Ricciuti is a Presbyterian Minister currently studying Biblical Studies at the Institute for Christian Studies.

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[21] See J. Richard Middleton, "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context," *Christian Scholars Review,* 24:1 (1994) pp. 8-25 This is an excellent analysis of how Israel's royal image was forged in the fire of Babylonian oppression to subvert astral deities and present an alternative vision of Yahweh and the cosmos.

[22] ***rada*** means "to trample, to tread" as in the treading of a winepress (e.g., Joel 3:13, 4:13). ***Kabas*** can mean forcible subjection, such as rape (Jeremiah 34:15).

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8

Jubilee or Idolatry? A Radical Antithesis

Brian J. Walsh

> In the bar, in the senate, in the alley, in the study
> Pimping dreams of riches for everybody
> Something for nothing, new lamps for old
> And the streets will be platinum, never mind gold
> Well, hey, pass it on,
> Misplaced your faith and the Candy Man's gone
> I hate to tell you but the Candy Man's gone
> Bruce Cockburn, "Candy Man's Gone," ©1983 Golden Mountain Music Corp. From the album, *The Trouble with Normal.*

Jubilee 2000 is an international coalition of Christians with an audacious project. They are committed to declaring the year 2000 to be a year of Jubilee in the full biblical sense. To this end they will lobby governments, international financial institutions, churches, investors and anyone who will listen to engage in economic practices that will forgive Third World debt at the end of the millennium. Not surprisingly this vision tends to be met with incredulity if not outright scorn. The World Bank, the IMF, rich nation states and even ordinary citizen's struggling through life trying to pay the mortgage are not too likely to find such a jubilee vision to be all that believable.

This jubilee vision of restorative justice is so wild that people find it difficult to even begin to imagine that such a radical proposal could ever be implementable. Even people inclined to believe the Bible are often quick to point out that the stipulations for the Jubilee year were surely never followed.[1] And such a vision is unimaginable because it seems so impossible. Jubilee visionaries are simply out of touch with economic realities. Debts canceled means dividends decreased. An economic vision that privileges justice for the poor may seem to take the high moral ground but it occupies such a place at the expense of economic sanity and common sense. This vision cannot be implemented because the system of global economics could not countenance its implementation.

When imagination is constricted and reality is organized in such a way that alternative paths that would bring about justice and equity are deemed impossible, idolatry is always lurking

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1. It is telling that one seldom hears people make the same observation about laws regarding adultery, murder, covetousness, etc. People *want* to believe that Jubilee was never practiced because that would then mean that we would no longer need to feel that this was a biblical vision that calls for obedience in the context of our highly economized lives. Whether Israel ever actually practiced Jubilee is not the issue. They never abandoned a lifestyle of adultery, murder and covetousness either. What is significant was that Israel could have ever even *imagined* such an economic, social and agricultural order as that found in the Jubilee vision. But there is one other point that needs to be made here. Jubilee *was* observed in Israel, at least for the land. In Israel's memory, the Babylonian exile is seen as a granting to the land the sabbath rest it had been denied for so long (2 Chron. 36.21, cf. Lev. 26.34). Further, Jeremiah's buying of the field behind enemy lines (Jer. 32) bears witness to his faith that Jubilee will one day be realized.

nearby. What is at stake in the vision of "Jubilee 2000" is nothing less than a life and death struggle with the idols of our age. To proclaim Jubilee at the end of this millennium is to challenge the forces of idolatry in a manner reminiscent of Elijah's taking on the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18).

Biblical Foundations

The foundational distinction in biblical faith is neither heaven/earth nor even good/evil, but Creator/creation. It is here that the biblical witness begins and ends. This is the basis of the radical, creational and covenantal monotheism that is the enduring witness of Israel. The world, in all of its diverse complexity, is called into being (*creatio per verbum*) by a God who overflows in extravagant love.[2] That love engenders being.[3] "The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" proclaims the psalmist (30.5). And this creation is portrayed as a dynamically responsive covenantal partner to its Creator, responding with eloquent praise. Such a creation, the founding story delights to remind us, is declared by the Creator to be good, even very good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

But the creation is not Creator. This distinction is foundational.[4] In the midst of the intimacy and joy of the Creator/creation relationship (indeed, the Creator is depicted as getting down and playing in the mud at the creation of humanity in Gen. 2:7), the convictions that the Creator is not a creature, and that the creature is not to be confused with the Creator, are never lost. This does not mean, however, that the creation is without an image of the Creator. Indeed, the founding story portrays humanity in precisely this way. Humankind, male and female, is called to image the Creator and to rule the creation in precisely the same way that the life-engendering, creation-blessing Creator has demonstrated the divine rule.

These two foundational claims of biblical faith – the Creator/creature distinction and the depiction of humanity as bearing the image of God – are indispensable if we are to understand the nature of idolatry and the reason for the sustained biblical attack on all idolatry. The Apostle Paul sums up the biblical tradition well when he says that "claiming to be wise, [humanity] became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animal or reptiles." He goes on to say that "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever" (Rom. 1:22, 25). Human beings are constitutively, structurally, image-

2. This is developed further in J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than It Used to be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill. InterVarsity Press, 1995), chap. 7.

3. This is an important insight developed by Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation,* trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM, 1985), chap. 4.

4. This is developed further in Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), chap. 3.

bearers. That is to say, human beings are created in such a way that they invariably root their lives in an ultimacy that is authoritative, grounding and directive of all that they do. We are, if you will, *home religiosus.* Created in the image of God we can do nothing other than seek a God (or god) to serve and image in the totality of our lives, especially in our stewardship of the rest of creation.[5] If we turn away from our covenanting Creator then this does not mean that we are no longer image-bearers. Rather, such turning away will necessarily result in idolatry. As image-bearers, as *homo religiosus* we will seek something else to image and serve. But since the only categories that biblical faith will recognize as ultimately foundational are Creator and creation, then it follows that we will find something in the creation to serve as our god, our ultimate. We will take some thing, or more usually some dimension of creatureliness that is, in itself a good gift from the Creator, and make it into our god, thereby distorting that dimension of creation (whether it be fertility, national or ethnic identity, security, scientific analysis, technological power or economic growth) in such a way that what was good comes to have demonically evil power over our lives.[6]

That biblical faith is articulated in radical antithesis to all idolatry is evident in the first two commandments of the Decalogue. Rooted in the radical memory of exodus liberation –"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"– the first commandment insists that "you shall have no other gods before me," and the second follows with "you shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Ex. 20.2-4). The question has always been asked, what is the difference between these two commandments? – they both prohibit idolatry. In light of the two foundational insights noted above, perhaps we could say that the first commandment insists on the Creator/creature distinction and thereby prohibits anything that would attempt to usurp God's radical and sovereign authority in relation to the creation, while the second prohibits anything that would usurp humankind of their proper role in all of creation as the bearers of the Creator's image. Have no other gods because the Creator, revealed as a covenantal liberator in the exodus story, is the only true God. Have no graven images because humanity is called to image the Creator through a loving and careful stewardship of creation.

In light of this radical antithesis of covenantal faith and idolatry it is not surprising that both torah and the prophets invariably identify forgetfulness of covenant with idolatry. Covenantal amnesia – forgetting that it is Yahweh who brought us up out of the house of slavery – is always manifest in idolatry.[7]

5. See Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

6. See Bob Goudzwaard, *Idols of Our Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

7. For example, see Deut. 6:12-15; 8:11-12; Hosea 4:6-19; Jer. 2:4-13. All of these texts connect idolatry to covenantal forgetfulness. This theme is explicated with passion and insight by Walter Brueggemann in *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) and *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

Torah, Jubilee and Idolatry

Torah stipulations about the sabbatical year, jubilee, redemption of property and servants, and the prohibition of interest-taking (all found in Lev. 25) are concrete historical, cultural and economic instantiations of what it means for humanity (specifically in this instance, Israel, which is to be a blessing to the nations), to image God in their stewardship of time, land, resources and relationships. Rooted in faith in a God who overflows in extravagant love such a jubilee vision receives the land – receives creation and its fertility – as a gift from this divine covenant partner. As the Creator rested from the labours of creation on the seventh day, so also is our life-work to be set in a context, not of ceaseless, anxious labour, but of rest. Sabbath and jubilee are for restoration of life, for setting slaves free, and for the forgiveness of debts because the God we are called to image is a God of radical historical liberation who is characterized by a long-suffering compassion and bountiful springs of forgiveness. Yet all of this comes to us in the form of law. But that too is not surprising. The God who we image is a God who speaks, indeed who speaks the very creation into being.[8] God's word, whether uttered at the foundation of creation, proclaimed to Pharaoh, or thundered from Sinai, is a word that engenders life and sets slaves free. And so we have a torah worthy of an obedience that abandons all pretense of human autonomy because in following this torah, in listening to this word, there is freedom and blessing. Such a jubilee vision engenders a spirituality of trust and sets our image-bearing stewardship within a context of relinquishing ultimate control over our lives.

If Leviticus 25 is all about imaging God within the context of sabbath, it is not surprising that the blessings and curses described in Leviticus 26 should be prefaced by a reference precisely to idolatry and sabbath:

> You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no carved images or pillars, and you shall not place figured stones in your land, to worship them; for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord (Lev. 26.1-2).

Idolatry is seen as a spirituality that is antithetical to a jubilee vision because idolatry can never keep sabbath. At issue here is, of course, fertility. How can we relate to the land in such a way as to guarantee fertility? The analogy in a market economy is clear. How can we so organize and exploit our resources so as to guarantee economic well-being? Idolatry assumes that land and fertility is not a gift received from the loving and gracious hand of a covenant-keeping Creator but a scarce and fickle commodity to be controlled and manipulated through sacrifice to the gods of the land. Rather than a creational stewardship set in the context of sabbath and gift, idolatry engenders an economics of anxious and incessant production because one could never be sure when the whims of the gods would decree a time of drought. Sabbath years, to say nothing of jubilee years, are agricultural and economic foolishness in the face of potential scarcity.

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8. Or "sings," if you prefer C. S. Lewis's telling of the story in the Narnia tales.

If a jubilee vision engenders a spirituality of trust within an economics of enough (note that Lev. 25:20-22 reflects trust that there will always be enough resources to go around), then idolatry engenders a spirituality of fearful insatiability within an anxious economics of scarcity.

Deconstructing Idolatry

Israel's prophets were masters of deconstruction, and nowhere did they employ their deconstructive powers more effectively than in addressing idolatry. Given the relation of idolatry to covenantal amnesia noted above, it is not surprising that the prophets should devote so much attention to the problem of idolatry. A prophetic jubilee vision at the end of the twentieth century is also a struggle with idolatry and would do well to learn from the prophets.

1. Idols as Social Constructions

In order to deconstruct anything it must be established that what one is deconstructing is in fact a construct in the first place. Hosea notes that "with their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction," and that an idol "is from Israel, an artisan made it; it is not God" (Hosea 8:4,6). Isaiah delights to mock the idolator who carves an idol from the same piece of wood that he burns in the fire to warm himself and cook his meal. Such a person "feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray" (Is. 44:9-20). And while the psalmist might acknowledge that there is something powerful and attractive about things made from silver and gold, they are, nonetheless, "the work of human hands" (Ps. 115:4).[9] This insistence on the constructed character of idols is profoundly liberating because the power of idolatry, indeed the power of all social constructions of reality, is dependent upon our forgetting that these are historical constructs, not essential structures of reality.

This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the absolutization of economic growth at the foundation of neo-liberal economics. When Milton Friedman says that "corporate officials [have no] social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible,"[10] he really believes the Adam Smithian mythology that tells us that the market system with its self-interested entrepreneurs is not a particular construction of economic life at a certain time under certain conditions but a reflection of the natural order of things.[11] Neo-liberalism wants us to forget that it is a social construction not just because it is an ideology seeking its own self-

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9. See also Is. 40:18-25 and Jer. 10.

10. Quoted by Edward Vanderkloet, "Why Work Anyway?" in *Labour of Love: Essays on Work* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1980), p. 34.

11. Peter Berger called this projection of a social construction onto the structure of the world, cosmization: "the identification of the humanly meaningful world with the world as such."*The Sacred Canopy Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 27.

perpetuation, but more foundationally because it is rooted in an economistic idolatry that masks itself as an essential structure of life.

2. Idols Fashion us in their Own Image

When a cultural construct takes on a life of its own, it acts back on its producers. This was an important insight (forgotten in later years) of Peter Berger.[12] Biblical faith recognizes this to be the case with idolatry. As image-bearing creatures we cannot help but be fashioned in the image of our gods. Speaking of idols the psalmist writes,

> They have mouths, but do not speak;
> eyes, but do not see;
> They have ears, but do not hear;
> noses, but do not smell.
> They have hands, but do not feel;
> feet, but do not walk;
> they make no sound from their throats. (Ps. 115:5-7)

And then the psalmist offers this observation:

> Those who make them are like them;
> so are all who trust in them. (Ps. 115:8)

If our idols have no words of revelatory power and prophetic insight to utter, then we too will be mute. If they are impotent to see the suffering of the poor, hear the cry of the oppressed, smell the stench of our societal decay, reach out with hands of healing, walk along the path with refugees and the homeless, then we too will be impotent to do any of these things. Those who make them are like them. If our god is the idol "economism" then it is not surprising that we begin to look like the mannequins in the windows at the mall and we somehow feel unfulfilled unless we are constantly consuming. And it will not be surprising that we will live in a society that meets stock market crashes with language of Armageddon,[13] because economic growth is the driving force in history.

But the most pernicious way in which idols reshape us in their own image is the way in which they capture our imaginations. When we simply *assume* that progress in science, technology and economics is our historical destiny and that a standard of living can be measured by the growth of the GNP, and we think that it is *normal* for there to be a proliferation of cheap

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12. In *The Capitalist Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), Berger's claim that capitalism needs no legitimation because it has the "normative power of facticity" on its side falls into precisely the kind of alienated reification (a cosmization that has forgotten that it is such) which he warned against twenty years earlier. (See especially pages 207-208.)

13. The headline in *The Toronto Star* after the crash of Oct. 19, 1987.

and useless consumer goods, a growing gap between the rich and the poor, that it is normal (sad perhaps, but normal nonetheless) for there to be constantly high levels of unemployment, food bank use, environmental despoliation and crippling international (and personal) indebtedness--our imaginations have been taken captive by idolatry. When people can not imagine life other than the presently oppressive and broken status quo, then they are in the grips of idolatry. The idols do not want us to have liberated imaginations because then we just might start living differently. Is a jubilee vision--of forgiven international debt, a politics of justice and compassion, an economics of enough and generosity, and a relation to creation that is characterized by loving care--unimaginable? Only if we as individuals and as a society have bowed the knee to idols.

3. Idols Require Sacrifice

Idols maintain their control over our lives by instilling in us fear and requiring sacrifices of us. Jeremiah tells the story with his characteristic passion and pain. The people make "offerings to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known;" and they "have filled this place with the blood of the innocent and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which [Yahweh] did not command or decree, nor did it enter [Yahweh's] mind" (Jer. 19:4-5). Idols demand sacrifices. They are never satisfied. And they have an insatiable appetite for the blood of the innocent, the weakest and the children.

Any vision for jubilee at the dawn of the next millennium is up against precisely this kind of idolatry. The sacrifices demanded by the insatiable god of economic growth are the poorest of the earth. We continue to willingly place the poor from across the globe and down the street into the greedy hands of the murderous idol; we also place our own children there as we perpetuate an economic lifestyle that robs them of their inheritance. And when we raise our voice in protest we meet the fear-mongering that insists that the present arrangement must be maintained or the whole economic order will be thrown into chaos and our lives will be taken over by crippling economic insecurity.

4. Golden Idols are Worthless, Economic Profit doesn't Profit

In the passage cited above from Psalm 115 it is clear that biblical faith judges idols to be powerless. Against all of the empirical (and usually imperial) evidence, the biblical witness is that idols are impotent. There is a radical deconstruction going on here. What looks impressive (Baal's oversized reproductive organs, the skyscrapers of international finance that dominate our cityscapes, the economic structures of control and power of the World Bank and the IMF) are, in biblical imagination, impotent and weak. To submit to idols is to go "after things that do not profit," says Jeremiah (2:8). Indeed, Jeremiah says,

> But my people have changed their glory
> for something that does not profit.
> Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
> be shocked, be utterly desolate. (Jer. 2:11b-12)

Why should the heavens be so appalled at all of this? Because human "glory" is directly related to bearing the image of God in our stewardship of creation (cf. Ps. 8) and if humans exchange that glory (remember Rom. 1) for idolatry, then their stewardship of creation will reflect that idolatry with all of its disastrous consequences.[14] Idolatry, claims the Scriptures, goes against the very grain of the creation and distorts the nature of humanness together with any proper accounting of what is of value in human life. Idolatry does not profit human life, especially if that idolatry is myopically directed to economic profit. Such profit does not profit. Moreover, Jeremiah also notes that going after idols is going "after worthless things," with the result that idolators become "worthless themselves" (Jer. 2:4b).

5. Idols Enslave

Idolatry is never simply a matter of false belief unrelated to the praxis of life. Idolatry is a deep structure of certain economic, political, cultural, legal, ecological practices. One engages in such practices, such patterns of life and simply assumes that there is no other way to live. As I have noted above, this is a pernicious way in which idolatry takes hold of our lives. Hosea has a devastating way to describe this process:

> Their deeds do not permit them
> to return to their God.
> For the spirit of whoredom is within them,
> and they do not know the Lord. (Hos. 5:4)

Idolatry is described in Hosea and throughout the prophets that follow as a form of prostitution. Canadian singer/songwriter Bruce Cockburn is undoubtedly right--the dreams of economic abundance in our time are proffered to us by pimps; they have an air of prostitution to them. And just as we often see prostitutes in oppressive situations with no way out, so Hosea describes idolatry in terms of a spirit of whoredom from which there is no exit. We find ourselves enslaved to our gods, the gods of our own making! And the praxis of idolatry, our deeds, our cultural way of life, makes it impossible to make any other choices. This is the spirit that we meet when we are told that Jubilee cannot be proclaimed and enacted at the turn of the millennium. Their deeds, rooted in their idolatry, have such power over them that economic life, history, the future, is all closed to them. These deeds will not permit, indeed this praxis prohibits, any other path.

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14. See also Hos. 4:7, 7:16, 13:1-3, and Ps. 106:20.

This is the idolatry that we must face should we dare to proclaim jubilee. If anyone should have had occasion to lose hope and to give up the struggle it would have been Jeremiah and Hosea. But Jeremiah buys that field in occupied territory and Hosea offers us a most beautiful vision of what jubilee looks like:

> I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.
> On that day I will answer, says the Lord,
> I will answer the heavens
> and they shall answer the earth;
> and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
> and they shall answer Jezreel;
> and I will sow him for myself in the land.
> And I will have pity on "Not-pitied,"
> and I will say to "Not-my-people," "You are my people";
> and he shall say, "You are my God." (Hos. 2:18-23)

Jubilee *will* come! But notice who brings it. "I will, I will, I will!" The restoration that we long for and that we dare proclaim and attempt to enact in our lives is not a restoration that ultimately results from our labours. Jubilee is a sabbath and we do our labour – even our labour in the face of the idols – not with paralyzing anxiety but with empowering trust, trust that the Lord of the Sabbath will make good on the Jubilee promise.

Brian J. Walsh is Christian Reformed Chaplain at the University of Toronto and Adjunct Professor of Theology at the Toronto School of Theology.

9

The Idolatrous Theology of the International Monetary Fund

John Mihevc

In an oppressed world, evangelization must direct its attention mainly to idolatry, not to atheism." (Richard: 3)

The economic crisis of the Asian economies has served to thrust the policies of the International Monetary Fund into the spotlight. This powerful institution was previously content to carry out its work in relative obscurity, emerging only to "rescue" developing countries from the brink of economic disaster. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the scenario repeated itself throughout Latin America and Africa: countries could no longer service their debts and were forced to call upon the IMF. The IMF, "the lender of last resort" provided a badly needed infusion of funds and and quelled the fears of jittery investors. But the new money came at a high price as these countries were obliged to cut back their spending dramatically and raise interest rates to ensure that their debts could be serviced and "market confidence" restored.

Throughout the past two decades the IMF has successfully weathered a number of crises, growing more powerful after the collapse of the Mexican economy. In the process, the IMF has moved from being a minor lender to become the major enforcer of foreign debt service and promoter of free and open markets throughout the South. With the crisis in the Asian economies the IMF is being granted unprecedented power and funding to intervene and virtually control the operations of these flagging economies.

One might ask how such an institution manages to grow more powerful with every crisis in spite of the mounting evidence that its solutions have only served to exacerbate the problem. Part of the answer lies in the fact that the world's richest countries find it useful to have an institution like the IMF to carry out the dirty work of collecting debts and enforcing an economic model that suits their interests. But the legitimacy of the IMF also is derived from the function it serves as an institution promoting an idolatrous theology. It is in playing this role that it is accorded legitimacy in the present global order by both rich and poor nations.

As noted in the previous article, the proclamation of the Jubilee vision must devote its attention to the struggle against idolatry in our present context. And there is no doubt that the biblical prophets would have fixed their critical gaze on the IMF as one of the predominant idolatrous institutions.

This paper builds on many of the insights on idolatry developed in the previous paper by Brian Walsh and offers a case study of idolatry using the International Monetary Fund. The International Monetary Fund promotes an idolatrous theology in fundamental opposition to the theology of Jubilee. The categories of idolatry developed in the previous chapter, will be considered in light of the policies and prescriptions of the IMF as seen primarily through the speeches of its Managing Director Michel Camdessus.

1) **Idols are social constructions. The Jubilee vision affirms God as creator and liberator.**

The first two commandments in the Bible warn against idolatry. The first emphasizes God as creator and the prohibition against worshipping false gods. These false gods or idols are human constructions but are worshipped as absolute. The Jubilee vision affirms the creator God and the giftedness of creation for all of humanity to share and enjoy.

The IMF offers up the machinations of the market as absolute. No country can escape the iron grip of the market which rewards countries that follow its dictates and punishes those that fall into debt. Even the slightest weakness in a sea of good virtue can spell disaster and years of suffering as the crisis in Asia amply demonstrates. The following passage from a June 1998 speech of Camdessus illustrates the moral universe of the market: ". . . the lesson from this crisis is that in a globalized economy a few macroeconomic virtues are not enough. Constant vigilance must be maintained over all socioeconomic parameters, yet in each of these countries, there were lapses." ("From the Asian Crisis")

In the same way that the reasons for failure are attributed to market forces that cannot be altered, so too the solutions involve a strict adherence to market principles no matter the cost in human suffering. In effect, the extent of human suffering becomes a measure for the success of the policies, a form of expiation to an insatiable idol.

The IMF's power lies in conferring absolute power to a social construction: the market. The way the IMF refers to the market has the hallmark of idolatry, namely that it disavows its own role as the creator of this artifice. Yet, it is the IMF, with its own gold and power bestowed on it by the richer nations, virtually control the economies of the poorer countries. There is no context or relationship with this idol, only submission and obedience.

Camdessus' explanation for the crisis in Asia demonstrates this view of the market. In commenting on the causes of Thailand's problems he declares: "Markets pointed to the unsustainability of Thailand's policies . . . And this "denial syndrome" contributed to the delay in taking corrective measures." ("Rebuilding Confidence in Asia")

In the Bible idols are intended to represent materially the god that resides within. Yet, as the prophets remind us, they are human constructions and to recognize this liberates us from the enslaving power of the idols. The power of the market as idol lies in our forgetting that it is indeed a human construct. And yet, because the market is seen to be invisible it is accorded an even more divine apprehension. The source of its power is human, yet this source is disavowed. In both cases the result is the same. The market offers false liberation through submission to an oppressive power.

This is idolatry because it is the "subjugation of the human being and of human life to a product of human labour, with the consequent destruction of the human being per se through the relationship that is established with an idol." It is also invisible. The Jubilee vision instead offers the human being, in the image of God, whose will is that the concrete human being be the center of society and of history. (Hinkelammert: 191-192)

2) **Idols fashion us in their own image.**

When we do not image the creator God we image idols, as a way to gain control over others. Making a graven image remakes humans in that image. The Jubilee vision is one of stewardship over creation not of domination. Because humans are created in the image of God any situation which does not affirm the radical equality of all humans before God results in idolatry.

One need only read through a handful of IMF documents to realize how lacking in imagination and context they are. The same message permeates each address by its Director or analysis whether it be to African leaders, Asian bankers or global union leaders. There is no acknowledgement of the human suffering that their policies cause, only of the difficult path that must be taken to become debt free and attain strong growth rates.

In spite of the fact that the Asian crisis presented a very different context and called for a very different analysis than the Latin American and African debt crises, the solution demanded is the same: massive layoffs, sharp reduction in credit, increased taxes and higher interest rates, cuts in spending on health and education, and currency devaluation. When we are in the grip of idols there are no alternatives, only policies to follow; there is no imagination because all crises are manifestations of the same sin or shortcoming: failure to adhere to the market idol.

In this way the IMF echoes the word of the psalmist describing those who fashion idols:

> They have mouths, but do not speak;
> eyes, but do not see;
> They have ears but do not hear; noses but do not smell.
> They have hands, but do not feel; feet but do not walk;
> they make no sound from their throats.
> Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them (Ps. 115: 5-8).

Just as the threat of bankruptcy and economic chaos, coupled with the promise of a massive infusion of funds, succeeded in forcing Asia's battered economies to accept the IMF medicine, it was necessary for Camdessus also to travel to Africa to speak to its leaders and keep them on board. For Africa the message was not to learn the wrong lesson from the Asia crisis and abandon adjustment policies. The years of sacrifice, for Camdessus, are just starting to pay off in higher growth rates which de facto means that poverty is being eliminated: "It is here that we must interpret correctly the messages coming to us from Asia. We should read them not as a sign to reject globalization, but rather to reject the mistakes that were made" ("Africa: A Continent on the Move"). Instead Camdessus urges African leaders to move even more quickly and deeply to embrace globalization by removing all of the last vestiges of state regulation.

3) **Idolatry demands sacrifice for some hoped-for future success through structural adjustment and deficit financing. Jubilee is generational, it is about restoration.**

In today's global economy, the "necessary sacrifices" demanded of a country are to pay ones debts and carry out SAPs. Governments that fall into the temptation of doing good by preserving social spending etc. only worsen the situation. There is no other path even though the result is much suffering and death. (Mo Sung)

While "necessary sacrifices" [by others] can be mitigated at times, they cannot be avoided. When these sacrifices do not bear fruit we are reminded that it is because we have not sacrificed enough. "Such a theology has the "advantage" of giving meaning to the suffering of people who don't know how to go beyond it. But, and above all, it legitimizes the process of oppression." (Mo Sung)

Instead of making both lenders and borrowers share the burden when things go awry, the IMF instead demands sacrifices from those who can least afford to make them: the poor, women and children. (Dennis: 32) It is these groups on whom the structural adjustment policies have wrought incredible misery and suffering in the name of restoring investor confidence and efficiency back into these economies.

When we look at the discourse of people like IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus we can identify the interweaving of two types of discourse: praising the virtues of free and open markets but also the discourse of solidarity announcing that IMF's goal is also the elimination of poverty and unemployment. This discourse of solidarity is particularly important to legitimate the "necessary sacrifices" that have to be made to achieve prosperity. This kind of expiatory theology, notes Julio de Santa Ana, is indicative of a cultic piety based on tribute, expiation, guilt and conformity. Those who do not conform to the body of prevailing prescriptions are dangerous and unclean and must readjust to be considered worthy. (De Santa Ana: 32)

Camdessus often refers to globalization as "interdependence" and "effective solidarity". High priests like Camdessus are the ones who "pimp dreams" which can never in practice be realized, because the sacrifice demanded is perpetual. African and Latin American countries have adjusted their economies according to the dictates of the IMF over the past two decades only to see their debts increased and the disparity between rich and poor widen. In this way, a reign of terror and injustice can be unleashed because it purports to serve the goal of solidarity and future economic rewards for all.

For Camdessus, there is no contradiction between free markets and solidarity: "We know that God is with us in the task of making fraternity grow. It is we who administer the change and we who are also the bearer of sharing. . . You are the men of the market and of the enterprise in search for efficiency in solidarity. The IMF was created to place international solidarity at the service of countries in crisis and to make an effort to assure more efficient economies. And you know as well as I how related efficiency and solidarity are to one another." ("Address to Christian Businessmen," cited in Mo Sung)

In fact, according to Camdessus, the only way to protect the poor is through adopting structural adjustment policies: "Does this emphasis on prudent macroeconomic policies and supporting structural reform sound like the constant refrain of the IMF? Of course! But it should also be the theme of all those who really care for the most vulnerable in society, because reasonably stable prices and steady growth are so important-- not just to reassure the financial markets, but also to protect the poor." ("Making Globalization Work")

In contrast, the Jubilee vision is one of restoration and generation. The Jubilee legislation places the burden of responsibility on the creditor not only to release the poor from their debts but also to provide them with sufficient resources to make a fresh start. In this instance we see the expression of God's economy as radically opposed to an economy built on scarcity and unlimited growth. Witnessing to the reign of God may require sacrifice but this must be distinguished from the kinds of "necessary sacrifices" demanded of the poor in the name of a sacralized institution.

4) **Idols are demonic and life-destroying. Jubilee is a vision of life-giving hope.**

For those who practise idolatry there is no alternative. Failure means not working hard enough, and the need to deepen reforms. The IMF Director has parlayed the Asia crisis into a bold gambit for even more power. The lesson of this morality tale, as recounted by Camdessus repeatedly in recent speeches is that globalization offers fantastic rewards, "higher productivity, faster growth and development, higher living standards and lower poverty."("Africa: A Continent on the Move") However it is fraught with danger and peril. The IMF has emerged with the new insight that countries need to be more forthcoming in providing timely information in order to avoid future crises: "Indeed, the golden rule for a globalized world Mr. Chairman, is transparency." ("Africa: A Continent on the Move") Total submission and full disclosure of information is the mainstay for idols and cult leaders that demand from their followers everything as a way of maintaining dominance and control.

The denunciation of idolatry and affirmation of God is always within the context of hope and liberation or of Jubilee. On the other hand, notes Pablo Richard, "When idolatry appears, it is intimately linked to the situation of political oppression." (Richard: 11)

It will take decades to recover from the human damage wrought by IMF policies. Generations of children's health and education are being sacrificed on the altar of servicing debts and embracing unfettered market principles.

The Jubilee vision is one of hope and restoration. It is life-giving because it offers a new beginning, growing out of the recognition that in the course of human affairs "corrections" are periodically required in order to ensure that all are able to live from God's bountiful creation. These kinds of "corrections" are in profound opposition to the kinds of "corrections" imposed by markets and the IMF which are life-destroying.

To proclaim Jubilee in these times is to condemn idolatry in the context of hope and liberation. It also entails a radical confrontation with the present system of idolatry. This can be achieved first by exposing the theological and idolatrous nature of the present economic system but more importantly to advance an alternative economics. As Ched Myers argues: "we must diligently and creatively explore what contemporary, concrete analogies might be to Jubilee practices of old. . . . In all this the church can help nurture commitment and creativity by promoting "Sabbath literacy," a spirituality of forgiveness and reparation, and practical economic disciplines for individuals, households and congregations." (Myers, "Jesus' New Economy": 39)

5) **Idols are insatiable and enslaving, espousing a theology of greed. Idolatry strips humans of their responsibility and agency. Jubilee is the theology of enough.**

In Paul's writings idolatry is linked to greed and the power which money bestows. The idolater is a usurer, thief and swindler. (Ephesians 5:5) The IMF preaches the gospel of prosperity which is the gospel of capital accumulation and free markets of liberalized greed for the benefit of all. The recent crises in Mexico and Asia illustrate the role of the IMF as usurer, thief and swindler in one, forcing their own money on these economies to ensure an orderly flow of wealth to creditors in exchange.

As economist Franz Hinkelammert argues, the economic world is bereft of human agency - it is commodities that take action (i.e the dollar), humans only follow along. (Hinkelammert, 169) When a Canadian bond trader was recently asked to explain his role in causing the Canadian dollar to slide he pleaded that it was not his fault, he was simply *reacting* to global market forces. Entrepreneurs like the IMF preach the good news of subjugation to the anonymous machinery of the market. Their role is not to save humans but to rescue the dollar, fight inflation etc. The pre-eminent virtue in face of the market is "humility" the reward for which is the "economic miracle."(Hinkelammert, 166) As Camdessus puts it, "Your task is to help your members understand and adapt successfully to the forces of globalization." (Making Globalization Work)

According to the IMF there is no alternative to globalization accept to submit to its inexorable unfolding. "How can advanced economies ... cope with problems of de-industrialization and widening income gaps? The answer is not to try to resist globalization. The answer is to provide workers with opportunities to adapt to the fundamental change that is occurring in all advanced economies ... ." (Making Globalization Work)

Jubilee is the antithesis of this vision. Accumulation must be curtailed and clear limits placed on human greed through laws and regulation. Idolatry always seeks more as a response to crisis, Jubilee seeks to put an end to further suffering through restoration. In Jubilee economics, "God's people are instructed to dismantle, on a regular basis, the fundamental patterns and structures of stratified wealth and power, so that there is "enough for everyone." (Myers, "God Speed": 26)

As the global economy teeters from one crisis to the next it is clear that those who are in a position to act have become totally enslaved by the idolatry of the market. There is no context, and very little imagination, freedom, responsibility, compassion or solidarity. The Jubilee vision stands in stark opposition to this vision by offering hope for a new beginning. It is a vision however, as the prophets remind us, that we must always be struggling to realize as we seek to recognize and resist the idols in our midst.

John Mihevc coordinates the Economic Justice Programme at the Inter-Church Coalition on Africa.

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10

The Song of the Ram's Horn: Child Poverty and Jubilee

Jennifer Henry

Jubilee: A Compelling Refrain

In **Proclaim Jubilee**, Maria Harris speaks of religious traditions that hold flashpoints within them. At a moment in history when the time seems ripe, and the need is urgent, they erupt like starbursts, bringing the brightness of their insights to the problems and challenges of that place and time. The same religious tradition or theme begins to emerge anew across the globe in scattered unconnected places, in very different contexts, yet lifting up the same resonant concepts.

She argues that Jubilee is like this: From the call of the Vatican for a great year of Jubilee to the World Council of Churches work on the same theme in advance of the 1998 Assembly in Harare, from the writings of feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether, to the work of liberation theologians like Jon Sobrino, from the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town to the Lutheran Church of America or the Roman Catholic Bishops of Brazil, at this time in history, all are raising their voices in a chorus of harmony—distinct but convergent—singing the powerful song of Jubilee.

In Canada we have heard the refrain, and found the call compelling. People working on Jubilee in Canada began, not out of the arbitrariness of a calendar date, such as the year 2000, but out of the crisis facing our globe to which Jubilee responds. Our world needs Jubilee—people are dying for it. Whether it is the people of the countries of the South, forced to sacrifice their future to meet the burden of debt, or workers enslaved by the global market place; children living in poverty or the unemployed; aboriginal people seeking justice or the earth needing rest; it is not a time but the time for rest, release and renewal—not chronos but kairos. Our world can wait no longer for a new beginning. The practices and solutions, vision and challenge embedded in the tradition of Jubilee have never been more resonate.

In the Canadian context, a proclamation of Jubilee leads the churches to reflect and act together on issues related to global debt remission. We have committed ourselves to Jubilee 2000, a global campaign for the cancellation of unpayable debt in the most impoverished countries. Beyond the debt issue, we have also committed to study, reflect, educate, coordinate and act on other justice issues that emanate from this proclamation. Child poverty is one such issue that substantively, and by virtue of the long- standing Canadian campaign for child poverty eradication, Campaign 2000, draws consideration. What might the biblical Jubilee have to say about this pressing concern?

The Issue of "Child Poverty"

That an appalling degree of child poverty exists in Canada is an undeniable fact: approximately 1. 5 million children in fall under the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Off (the most frequently used measure of poverty). The more contentious point is the very notion of "child poverty" as a discrete issue. It has been suggested that the way in which poverty is

increasingly framed, that is the segmentation that leads to the notion "child poverty"—reflects a broader Canadian social policy shift. This paper will address this conceptual shift, using "child poverty" as a window. It will speak to what Jubilee has to offer in terms of a different way of thinking, be it challenge or vision, and will address some concrete steps churches might take to put a Jubilee vision into practice.

The issue of "child poverty", as it is currently framed by dominant media or as a federal government focus, is indicative of a re-insertion in the Canadian context of the notions of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. This distinction, with its roots in the moral values of the Elizabethan poor laws, reflects the notion that some people can't help themselves (and therefore are worthy of assistance) while others won't help themselves (and so are unworthy of assistance). This vision of humanity draws heavily on a belief that some people are naturally lazy and inclined towards dependency. It tends to place blame on individuals for their poverty, suggesting if they "tried" a little harder to seek work, for example, they would not find themselves in this situation. Whether they be called "lazy", "dependent", "responsible for their own situation" or simply "unwilling to change", a whole segment of the poor are construed as "undeserving" of society's assistance.

Social Policy in Canada: A Different Past

While we never fully freed ourselves of making this kind of distinction, there was a period in Canadian social welfare history when the categorizations of "deserving" and "undeserving" were far less popular than they are today. One place where a more progressive view was evident, was in the legislative framework of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) created in 1966. Under the now cancelled CAP, the commitment was made to deliver income support to those in need, regardless of place of residence in Canada, without the requirement to work for welfare, and with a right to appeal should assistance be denied. The preamble even included the goal of the elimination of poverty. CAP reflected a view, inspired in part by the experience of the Great Depression, that each of us had the potential to fall into poverty, and that all, including the federal government, were responsible for creating a system to lift people out of poverty. Conversely, if poverty existed, we were somehow at least partly responsible for it; it was a societal failure.

A sister program of CAP was Unemployment Insurance (now Employment Insurance), which in order to reflect this kind of shared responsibility for hardship, the government previously made a contribution beyond that of the employer and employee. This was a recognition that the fiscal and monetary policies of the government affected the rate of unemployment; there was a societal cause, and therefore a societal responsibility. This legislative sense of shared responsibility, combined with a strong set of social programs built on the principles of universality (such as Family Allowance and Old Age Security), chipped away at Elizabethan notions that that there was a significant segment of the poor who were responsible for their poverty and therefore, were unworthy of help.

Re-insertion of Categories of Deserving and Undeserving

With the erosion or elimination of these programs and the policies of universality, or perhaps contributing to their erosion and elimination (whether you view legislation as prescriptive of ideological shift or as the result of such a shift), there has been an abdication of collective responsibility. The distinctions of "deserving" and "undeserving" have reasserted themselves in the public discourse with a vengeance, with children being one of the sole constituencies designated as "deserving". Children are increasingly the only ones viewed as being in the category: "the ones who can't help themselves". Their poverty is that about which governments must be concerned; they become almost the only ones to whom we must exercise a sense of responsibility.

In contrast to the statements made in the preamble of CAP committing us to the elimination of poverty for all , governments have made much more selective statements. In February of 1997, in a speech in the House of Commons, Finance Minister Paul Martin said, "Let us never come to believe that there is such a thing as a tolerable level of child poverty." While this is compelling support for children and their needs, singling them out in this way implies that there is such a thing as "a tolerable level" of adult poverty, women's poverty, or poverty in general.

In November of 1997 an Ekos Poll asked Canadians which of 12 issues would it be most in the public interest for them to respond to, should they be Prime Minister for a day and have $1 billion dollars. At the top of the list was support for children of the working poor. In a late December 1997 Vector poll, 77% of respondents indicated they would pay more taxes to address child poverty. A quick read of these polls should cause us some relief: Canadians have not lost their hearts; caring for neighbour is still high among their priorities.

However, it is not the results of these two surveys that is at issue, as much as the framing of questions, a framework which shows just how much the debate over poverty has shifted in the past 30 years.

Neither group was asked the straightforward questions: do you support addressing poverty as a high public priority or would you pay more taxes to eradicate poverty. The dilemma of poverty is construed as increasingly a dilemma of children in poverty, suggesting that should we successfully address the problems of poor children we will have addressed the poverty issue in its entirety.

In some provinces, poor children have been explicitly characterized as deserving of support over and against poor adults. In British Columbia, families with children received increased welfare benefits through savings drawn from a reduction in payments to single adults. The "solution" to the needs of poor children came at the expense of creating greater need among single adults. This political process of redistribution among the poor, from "less deserving" adults to "more deserving" children, comes as a result of increasing public comfort with these distinctions.

"Most" Deserving: The children of the working poor

Negative views of welfare recipients held by the public are contributing to the federal government initiating policy from a definition of "deserving" even narrower than the category children. Jean Swanson, Past-President of the National Anti-Poverty Organization suggests that an Ekos focus group process in which economically secure Canadians saw welfare recipients in "unremittingly negative terms", contributed to details of the recently implemented child tax benefit program (End Legislated Poverty, p. 7). The focus of this program is not on improving the situation for all children but children of working parents. Those families for whom welfare is a source of income do not receive any additional cash benefit. The most stigmatized of the poor, children of welfare recipients, see no increase through this policy designed to address "child poverty". Even within this category of "deserving children", there are "deserving" and "undeserving" distinctions.

The Ekos poll found a "great deal of skepticism expressed about the ability or willingness of parents [on welfare] to transfer assistance to their children". The federal government does not challenge these negative stereotypes, rather it bases policy on them. This targeted child tax benefit is sharply contrast with a distant precursor program, the Family Allowance. This program, originating in 1944, provided a benefit to all families with children reflecting a collective responsibility for all children's care. In contrast, the child tax benefit is an extremely selective, individually based program, rewarding not necessarily the "neediest" but the "worthiest" of poor children.

Many questions arise when we look at the kind of categorizations upon which policies such as the child tax benefit are based. The government would likely respond to these questions with a hope to help all poor children, but a fiscal ability to help only some. However, their fiscal choices reflect their governmental priorities. If they state their concern for all children in poverty, why not assist all children, drawing funds from the growing surplus in government finances, or at the least, spreading the identified funds across the entire constituency? Why design a policy that fails to benefit most poor children?

Jean Swanson asks, "Could it be an excuse to bring in more policies that force parents into the low wage work force?" (End Legislated Poverty, p.7).

When one group is rewarded, particularly when this is done at the expense of another disenfranchised group (such as in the BC example), it suggests an innocence of one in the face of their misfortune over and against another's fault. This is intensified when you are speaking of children as the "innocents".

Adults are responsible for their poverty, children are not (or as per the policy of the federal government it is only the children of working poor who are not responsible). Poverty becomes increasingly construed as a personal rather than structural dilemma.

Criminalization of the "Undeserving"

Stemming from these distinctions are a number of implications, perhaps most alarming is the undermining, regulation, even "criminalization" of people in the "undeserving" category. As welfare recipients are seen to be "at fault" for their poverty, governments have moved to reduce their levels of assistance, and rigorously monitor the distribution of what remains. The dominant view is that benefits should be set at the lowest level possible, while still preventing significant social unrest. Cutting back on people's benefits is seen to encourage self reliance—creating an incentive towards work—whereas the allocation of generous benefits is seen to increase dependency. Platforms of "welfare reform" (such as the one presented in Ontario by now Premier, Mike Harris), which have usually resulted in drastic cuts in benefits, are offered as if they are for welfare recipients own good. It is presented as if a lack of generosity is a laudable charitable strategy—a form of altruism through meagreness.

This is not just the approach for individuals but for categories, even regions of people. Single adults, single mothers (with children over 5), Atlantic Canada, new immigrants, First Nations people—all are accused of dependency. The way to a new beginning for these people in the context of modern social policy, is to reduce the amount of assistance to a level low enough so that being on government benefits becomes the appropriate punishment for that dependency, and paid work will be secured at any cost.

The message is clear, people (or regions) are so lazy they must be punished and then forced into productive activity. This is the "handup" not the "handout" idea, but the hand is not very gentle.

Beyond a reduction in benefits, low income people are increasingly experiencing an erosion of any rights they might have had. More and more, the notion is that people on welfare deserve to be policed, that they are likely to be abusing or defrauding services, and that any positive or productive behaviour, such as work, will come only through coercion. The result is snitch lines, proposals around the fingerprinting of welfare recipients, and workfare. Government policies mirror negative characterizations in the mainstream media, stereotyping which would likely be rejected if used to refer to almost any other marginalized group. Ironically, this negative attribution and regulatory practice is seen to be relevant only to individuals at the "bottom" end of the system, who receive support through social programs such as welfare, not to large corporations receiving incentives through tax expenditures and other means of government grants.

Backdrop of Scarcity

How are these characterizations and their manifestations in policy justified? They occur against a backdrop of perceived scarcity—that is, fear and anxiety about the Canadian capacity to provide sufficiently for the needs of its citizens. Over the last number of years, governments and mainstream media have promoted the view that as a country we would like to provide for all, but resources are so scarce that we need to severely circumscribe our caring impulses. While

government resources have been strained in recent years, solutions have been found almost entirely through cuts and restrictions in social programs, rather than through any significant expansion or redistribution in the tax base. As universal programs have been shifted to targeted programs, it has become clear, such as in the case of the child tax benefit, that it is not necessarily the neediest but the "worthiest" that are addressed.

Convinced we cannot provide collectively at the level that we might wish, we seem to no longer try.

It is this backdrop of perceived scarcity, which is only slightly abating with news of a government surplus, that fuels intergenerational conflict (e.g. seniors vs. children or youth). It pits disenfranchised groups against each other in a fight for government resources, making competition the primary strategy, and abandoning the principles and practices of community. Deep divisions are created as impoverished people see their services and supports decline, while the wealth of individuals and the profits of banks and corporations continue to grow. This "trickling up", a transfer of wealth from poor to rich, creates great social alienation. Child poverty is a sign of the growing social inequalities in Canada, divisions in community that will make our country a far worse place to live in for everyone.

Faithful Questions

As people of faith we need to engage in a discussion of child poverty conscious of the re-framing of poverty that forms a backdrop. We need to be aware of the implications of the messages present in recent legislation affecting poor children. Some of the following questions might be raised:

Does the government believe that children of welfare recipients are not in need of increased funds such as offered by the child tax benefit? Or if deemed in need, what is prohibiting their inclusion in this increased benefit? By virtue of their parent's welfare status, do the children themselves become unworthy? What of the impact of criminalizing policies such as finger printing on the lives of "innocent children"?

What of poor children who become poor adults? On their 18th birthday does their culpability suddenly shift, moving them from being deserving/worthy of support and priority, to being undeserving/unworthy? Isn't poverty in adulthood at least somewhat related to society's failure to provide support and opportunity in childhood? Should poor adults be blamed for that failure on our part when they were children? Under the BC welfare reform, money was taken from single adults, a significant number of which may have been poor children, to given the current generation of poor children. Is this kind of redistribution amongst the poor just?

What of this notion of scarcity in the context of a wealthy country such as Canada? Are services eroding due to a lack of resources, or due to a lack of political will to find creative ways in which Canadians can collectively express a care for their neighbour? What has been the role of the government and the mainstream media in fuelling the fear, anxiety and distrust that

abounds? What of the commitment to equality in community that Canadian social programs previously strove to reflect?

Jubilee: A New Pair of Glasses

Beyond these questions, our challenge as people of faith is to bring the wisdom of our traditions and teachings into engagement with contemporary issues. The re-insertion of Jubilee into the discourse of faithful people offers us an opportunity to broker a dialogue between this rich heritage and our present struggles. What might Jubilee have to say to the dilemmas raised by the debates on child poverty?

Jubilee is not mentioned often in the Judeo-Christian scriptures, described by name in only two passages: Lev. 25:1-55, and 27: 16-24. However, when you look at the two concepts central to Jubilee—that is Sabbath and Liberation—you see images and practices essential to the breadth and depth of our faith story.

Sabbath—of rest, renewal, regeneration, and holiness—is a practice that speaks to the belief that all that is, whether it be land or ourselves as created beings, all belong to God. To create structures that speak otherwise is idolatry. Sabbath is the essential first step in the vocation of liberation, action based on contemplation, cessation of work, and prayerful listening. Liberation—of freedom, justice, and release from oppression—is "the fast that God requires" (Isaiah 58: 6). To proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants, to sing freedom's song, to release the captives—all image the work of God, and of invite us to action as co-creators with God. Jubilee is the vibrant weaving, made out these two strands: Sabbath and Liberation.

Jubilee, as described in Leviticus, is a sign of brazen hope, proclaimed by an exiled people out of a context of great despair. Beginning with the day of atonement, the ram's horn sounds and Jubilee begins.

Jubilee embraces the earlier notions of Sabbath while going beyond to re-establish right relation through a redistribution of wealth: the concentration of land is addressed, slaves are released but with the generosity that would allow them to rebuild their lives, land is given rest, and debts are remitted. Sister Julianna Casey notes that Sabbath was an older tradition, while Jubilee was a new vision; not so much an evolution but a revolution, (Casey, p.). Jesus begins his ministry with this hopeful vision of Jubilee, and throughout his life lives Jubilee; his ministry is one of the places where the theory becomes practice.

What does Jubilee with its rich concepts central to our faith, have to say to contemporary issues, such as child poverty? Does the Jubilee lens shed new light on what might be the practices of churches engaged with the poor?

Jubilee: Radical Egalitarianism

In our context, distribution of resources to low income people is increasingly discussed related to notions of deservedness, as children, such as children of the working poor, receive increased support over and against other poor people. While we reassert these notions of personal worthiness in policy, the biblical Jubilee speaks to redistribution of resources without reference to deservedness.

One way we can see this is the way in which the Jubilee practice images God. Jim O'Keefe describes the Jubilee year, "as an expression of the way God loves and works". He says, "God is pure gratuitousness, pure gift"(in Davis et al, p.58). The people of Yahweh were to reflect that "gratuitousness", that sense of gift, in their interactions with each other, leading to cancelling debts, releasing slaves, and restoring land. The redistribution that occurs in Jubilee is an unconditional gift in so far as it makes no reference to the personal state of an individual or group of individuals as a precondition. The allocation is not related in anyway to blame or blamelessness, previous success or failure. The benefits to the poor of redistribution do not have to be earned, they are to come through the practice of Jubilee, and in being received they restore the whole community.

Jubilee is not a personal but a collective process. The day of atonement, the moment of repentance that precedes Jubilee, is not for the debtor or slave alone, but for the entire society. The causes of deprivation are construed as structural, and therefore the solution is structural. And as a solution, it is as necessary for the wealthy as for the poor. If any personal element is problematized, it is not "dependency" as our current society might construe it, but greed.

The Jubilee challenge for the non-poor, says Jon Sobrino, a Salvadoran theologian, is to recognize the structural sin of poverty in our midst and to react against it through compassion. However, the compassion with which we respond must be exercised with gratitude and offered as reparation. The obligation is not on the poor to be "deserving of our compassion", rather it is on us to make amends.

Sobrino says: "Jubilee is urgently needed if the poor of this world are to have life; but it must be put into practice for the sake of the world as a whole so that life may be given back its meaning" (Davis et al, p. 77).

Our country's reputation is one of caring concern for neighbour. If we as a country continue to be committed to equality and opportunity, our policies must express a reverence for these concepts—our practices are what give these concepts meaning. Jubilee challenges us to reject judgements of personal worthiness as pre-conditions to assistance for the poor. In contrast we are to consider the allocation of assistance more as a reparation for the structural sin that has resulted in their deprivation. As we provide strong and effective assistance to all of the poor of our country, with gratitude and as reparation, we reflect our societal worthiness. Our challenge, as Sylvia Keesmat puts it, is to an "economic right relation imaged as radical egalitarianism: that is the practice of Jubilee."

Jubilee: Generosity not Punishment

As we witness the way in which benefits to the poor are increasingly reduced, and criminalizing policies are enacted, we look to the biblical Jubilee for a response. There is a particularly sharp contrast between a restrictive response to the poor in our context and the generosity to the poor in the vision of Jubilee. Current social policy suggests the best way to assist the poor is through a constrained benefit that gives the right message, slightly punitive for past mistakes. Social assistance must be no better than the lowest wage, so that there is proper "incentive" for people to "make a new beginning" in low wage employment.

In Jubilee, new beginnings occur through redistribution, with generosity. At the time of Jubilee, freed slaves are to be provided liberally from the flocks, grain and wine of the one who sets them free (Deut. 15:13-14). The ability of the person to make a new beginning, or to be self reliant, is related not to punishment and restriction such as in our society, but to having sufficient resources (moving beyond even the basics to aspects reflecting quality of life). Liberal support is recognized as being necessary for that fresh start.

Facing the Jubilee challenge in Canada would mean a generous look at what needs must be met for people in our communities to live a life free from poverty. Instead of setting our goal as reducing the welfare rolls, achieved through lowering benefits, applying restrictions, and so stigmatizing recipients that they are driven away from community assistance, the goal must be to get people out of poverty, providing liberally so that people might have a fresh start. Pushing people towards low wage employment or preventing people from leaving situations of family crisis through the meagreness of community support is no solution. Some form of redistribution of work, so options other than low wage, exploitative work or workfare might be available for a welfare recipient's fresh start, would better image Jubilee than our current practices

The poverty gap in 1996 was $17.8 billion, that is the money required to bring all Canadians above the poverty line. "That is a huge but not outrageous amount of money in a country where the federal, provincial and territorial governments spent $386 billion in 1996 and where the value of all the goods and services produced as $820 billion" (National Council of Welfare, p.2). The savings in health care, in criminal justice and corrections, in child welfare, as well as in other manifestations of social alienation, would be dramatic. Providing liberally and generously for a fresh start for low income people would translate into a fresh start for all of us.

Jubilee: Abundance not Scarcity

The vision of the economy dominant in our current culture is that of scarcity. The notion of scarce government finances combined with a vision of unlimited need, breeds resignation to the problems of poverty and starvation. This claim of scarcity in the face of stratified wealth confirms deep divisions in the Canadian community, and nurtures fear, anxiety and distrust.

Jubilee turns this notion on its head. Leviticus 25:20-22 speaks of God providing all of the needs during the Jubilee year and the Sabbath year that precedes it. Richard Lowery draws the comparison: "If you assume that resources are abundant, sufficient for the survival and

prosperity of human life, and that human needs and wants are limited, then no one needs to starve or suffer the elements through lack of housing or clothing" (in Myers, p.28). This vision is based on trust in God. There is enough for all—the challenge is distribution, such as the redistribution called for in Jubilee practice, not further accumulation.

This trust in a world of enough is directly contrast with our current fear, and anxiety that breeds incessant production in the private sphere and competition among groups for resources in the public sphere. Trust that God provides is a fundamental reorientation: it bears not competition but the fruit of community.

Sabbath is the practice that displays this trust in God. Richard Lowery explains: "Sabbath observance requires a leap of faith, a firm confidence that the world will continue to operate benevolently for a day without human labour, that God is willing and able to provide enough for the good life" (In Myers, p. 27).

Jubilee as the Sabbath of Sabbaths displays ultimate trust

Within Jubilee is a recognition that the polarization which has taken place in Canadian society, does tend to occur. It reflects a realism that inequalities will inevitably appear, predicting that these inequalities will create deep divisions in community. As some are deprived while others thrive, and as governments claiming poverty move to protect wealthy interests, rage and alienation are nurtured. Where the Jubilee vision differs from modern capitalism, is in capitalism's resignation to this state of affairs. Ched Myers explains, "the biblical vision refuses to stipulate that injustice is àa permanent condition. Instead God's people are instructed to dismantle, on a regular basis, the fundamental patterns and structures of stratified wealth and power, so that there is 'enough for everyone'" (Myers, p. 26). Our Jubilee challenge is to restore community through redistribution, countering anxiety as the fundamental orientation for our country's policies. We must trust that Canadians can live out a commitment to provide for their neighbours, and go about finding ways to fulfil that vision.

Jubilee: A Challenge to the Churches

How might Canadian churches live out a proclamation of Jubilee in the area of child poverty?

1. Churches must continue to enter the child poverty debate, asserting the structural causes of poverty over and against characterizations of the poor as responsible for their misfortune. One of the key causes the churches must raise in the public discourse is the continued economic vulnerability of women as compared to men: this is perhaps the most direct cause of child poverty. Factors leading to women's economic vulnerability include: the absence of strong family support programs in Canada, ambivalence about women's dual roles, so that women are not supported adequately either as mothers or as

workers, undervaluing of parenting, and a labour market that does not provide decent jobs at decent wages.

Solutions to child poverty mean finding ways to address long term unemployment, low wages, lack of adequate levels of income support, and the absence of a national child care program. Proposals that address these issues would make up an advocacy agenda national churches might share with other social partners such as Campaign 2000 or the Alternative Federal Budget.

2. Churches must continue to raise deep concerns about the polarization of wealth, the criminalization of the poor, and the impact on community. National churches should strive to identify what they perceive to be the concrete impact on community of social policy decisions, using stories as well as innovative indicators that attempt to describe changes in social solidarity. National churches can actively support those local parishes and congregations who are trying to address the stigmatization of the poor in their area. Advocacy continues to be needed by low income people in the face of host of discriminatory policies, such as workfare or proposals for fingerprinting, as well as negative characterizations increasingly prevalent in the media. Our rejection of these policies, and the stereotypes on which they are based should be loud and clear.

3. Many of the charity programs in our churches whether they be clothing depots or food banks, work on the principle of distributing leftovers—that which we no longer want or need. Churches engaged in these programs and others, might, as a Jubilee action, explore what it would mean to offer not our leftovers, but the best that we have to the poor in our communities. The process might begin with a congregational assessment of strengths, whether they are buildings, people, or other kinds of assets.

The church might then plan in what way they might offer one of their key strengths, with generosity, to assist marginalized people in their community. This might be suggested nationally as a one Jubilee response, with stories collected and shared between communities. Sharing the best of what we have, be it assets put towards a housing project, or our finest church space offered to an anti-poverty activism group for meetings or an office—would reflect a compassion that is accompanied with gratitude and exercised as reparation.

4. We continue to plead scarcity on the government level, while private wealth and corporate profits rise. Churches might take the lead in a public debate on the question of what is "enough", bringing our best ethicists into engagement with this issue. We might explore this question on a global level, as a country, as a community, as a church or as a household. Offering a vision of economy drawn from the notion of God's abundance, we might begin to address need not through ever increasing growth, but through the strategies of redistribution which are available to us. For example, on a national level that might mean pursuing a tax policy that better redistributes, so that the difference between a rich and a poor child in Canada is much less than the current $42, 510 (a gap that places us 8th out of 9 industrialized countries).

The question remains, should churches engage in a campaign to eradicate child poverty as a Jubilee action? Only if we clearly recognize that a selective campaign such as this is a strategy to move us one step towards the eradication of poverty, and does not in anyway reflect our ultimate goal. That is, when we have eradicated child poverty, should we be so successful, we will not have finished. Much work will still be required. We need to act on child poverty not out of a notion of the child as "more deserving", but because their poverty represents the alarm bell signalling Jubilee must begin.

Jubilee flows from the sounding of the ram's horn. The horn is a wake up call to exploitation and oppression in our society. Children might be seen to blow the ram's horn; they are a barometer of social inequality in our midst. Their poverty is the song that tells us that things are dreadfully wrong in the Canadian community—life cannot continue as is. It is time for a new beginning, a time for Jubilee. Our Jubilee challenge is to restore the entire community to wholeness. Restoring poor children to their rightful place at the core of our community would reveal that the Jubilee process in our context and our time, though not complete, has begun.

Jennifer Henry is Coordinator of Education, Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice.

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11

Response to the *Vision* of the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative

Lydia Neufeld Harder

I. Context of this Response

Since I have been asked to give a "denominational perspective," I need to describe briefly the context out of which I speak for Mennonites.

The 200,000 or more Mennonites in Canada are gathered into at least 25 distinct organized groupings. Movies like "For Richer of Poorer" suggest that all Mennonites are like the Old Order Amish, who dress in distinctive ways and use horses and buggies instead of cars for transportation. However, these groups comprise only about 6% of all Mennonites in Canada. In fact, most Mennonites cannot be distinguished from the rest of the population in these external ways. Mennonites include people from Swiss, Dutch and German ancestry, but increasingly also from British, Chinese, Hispanic, Laotian, Vietnamese and Francophone background and ancestry.

Mennonites are heirs of the Radical Reformation tradition, named Anabaptism. We stress adult baptism and commitment to a particular community of faith. We have a history of being persecuted, particularly for our pacifist stand, one that has often placed us on the margins of society and made us suspicious of the mainstream. Only recently have we become more ready to dialogue with other churches.

There is no common organizational structure uniting all Mennonites. So I can not speak officially on behalf of any organization. The organization which includes most is the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the relief, development and practical service arm of the church. The fact that we work together better than we do theology together may indicate that our bias, even in theology, is practical.

Margaret Loewen Reimer summarizes it this way. Mennonites resemble a patchwork quilt: There are many Mennonite pieces but they are stitched together by a common name, similar roots (in the Radical Reformation), and a desire to follow Christ.[1]

II. The Jubilee Ethic

The over-all framework of Jubilee, as a way of speaking about the theme of justice and shalom, would be affirmed by many Mennonites. In recent decades the theme of Jubilee came into prominence in Mennonite vocabulary especially through the work of John Howard Yoder,

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[1] Margaret Lowen Reimer, *One Quilt, Many Pieces,* 3rd ed., Waterloo, ON: Mennonite Publishing Services, 1990.

especially his book, *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans Press, 1972) which has inspired and challenged Mennonites in a variety of ways.[2]

Yoder's interpretation of the Jubilee, as the crucial background to the proclamation and embodiment of the Reign of God by Jesus, focused particularly on the political dimension of the church's life. Yoder makes several important points for our discussion of Jubilee:

1) Yoder affirms that the Jubilee and Jesus' vision of the social order include substantive and concrete theological content. They do not only provide the zeal and the motivation, but also a means and an ethic by which to live out a new social order. I believe that the strength of the Jubilee document comes out of the substantive and practical directives that the biblical image of Jubilee gives for a new social order, albeit one requiring translation in a different political era. It is a vision, but it is also a practical guide for a new direction.

2) Yoder insists that this new social order is first of all a visible social-economic restructuring of relationships within the church, by those who confess that they are people of God. It is the experience of the new social order within the church that best gives the incentive and knowledge to speak to the larger social order.

I looked at the over-all framework in order to see whether this vision of transformation within the church is part of the ecumenical vision. In the section named contemporary proposals, the *Vision* is organized so that it moves from the smaller to the larger. It begins with the personal dimension, then moves to the church, then to the national, and then to the international dimension.

Mennonites would begin differently. We would begin with the church community, not because it is smaller or larger, but because it has been entrusted with the good news, and because its role in society is to embody that message in its very being. The individual is transformed by being nourished and challenged in that community. The larger national and international arenas are the contexts of the conversation of the church with various partners in the larger society. Mennonites assume that if the proclamation of the Jubilee is to have any integrity, it must find its embodiment first of all within its own social order as a community of faith.

What difference does this make in the implementation of the Jubilee vision? I remember when Mennonites began to speak about the evils of militarism. Some published a poster suggesting a modest proposal for the Church: "Let us begin, by resolving not to kill other Christians." Living out that resolution alone would have stopped most wars! Perhaps the challenge to the church must be, "Let's begin concretely by a redistribution of wealth within the church." It would be interesting to see how this would affect the larger economy! Would our words have more integrity if there were more examples of this commitment within the church?"

On a personal note, our congregation struggled for a long time with giving up control of the building it had owned for almost 50 years. However, there was an opportunity to invite two

[2] The third chapter, "The Implications of Jubilee," was freely adapted from Andre' Trocme's book. *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution*, translated from the French and published by Herald Press, 1973.

partners, a Hispanic congregation and a refugee settlement agency to build a new building with us. But for the others to really partner with us, our congregation had to give up control of the building. We have recently celebrated our new building as a co-owned building. The cost of nurturing new relationships was giving up control of what we owned!

3) Yoder suggests that the "power and principalities" spoken about in the Bible refer to what today we call the institutions and structures of society. This includes structures that we absolutize, such as nationalism, or militarism or economic systems. He suggests that Christ broke the power of these structures over us. As Christians we must live with the faith that God is already Lord over them, and is in the process of bringing in the reign of God by overcoming the evil in these structures. It is this conviction that can free us from these powers, so that we can live as a "revolutionary" community of shalom in this world.

In the discussion on "release from bondage," the *Vision* does call attention to our enslavement to the power of the economic system. However, the document does not emphasize what or who will free us from the psychological and spiritual power of the systems of which we are a part. The document seems to assume that we will be freed when we gain a new vision, when we confess our own implication in creating the economic systems. Seeing these powers as humanly constructed powers is helpful, but it also assumes that humans can easily challenge these powers. The biblical text is not naive about the "powers and principalities." It assumes that these are "gods" against which we fight, and that we need divine power to overcome them. Perhaps we should not be naive about the spiritual power of our systems either.

4) Yoder strongly emphasizes the cost of bringing about a new social order. In the 1970s Yoder's book challenged Mennonites to move out of their mode of being the "quiet in the land," to a new mode of being—an active, speaking and witnessing community. However, Yoder insisted that the means to do this would have to be congruent with the means that Jesus also used: non-violent resistance to those powers that are threatened by this new social vision. This implies that our best efforts may be thwarted by powers not in tune with God's reign. Our stance may become be a costly one as opposition mounts. After all, Jesus' way cost him his life!

In this respect, I missed an overt discussion in the *Vision* about the risk and the cost of living out a radical vision of Jubilee. There was much emphasis on proclaiming, with little discussion of what this might cost us personally and communally, or of the opposition that we will encounter if we try to implement this vision in the world. In this respect, the document reflects an idealistic rather than realistic vision.

5)Yoder suggests that success cannot be measured by our usual standards. We would soon lose our hope if this were true. Instead, we must be faithful to our convictions, because they are God-given and therefore good, even when change is not yet visible. In this document, there are proposals, but no real discussion of how we measure the success of Jubilee actions. What happens to the vision when opposition mounts? Will we continue to find creative ways to embody this vision, even if the larger picture does not change immediately? What will give us hope if we fail to see immediate success in what we do?

In summary, many Mennonites would identify with the biblical people in the time of exile. We often feel like we are attempting to be the People of God in a foreign land. We experience ourselves as people with dual citizenship. However, we understand our mission to be the same one as that given to the Exiles: "Seek the shalom (or Jubilee) of the city in which you dwell."

For Mennonites, it is ultimately the social community named church that mediates between the vision of Jubilee and the society at large. The church can proclaim the vision boldly, if it is itself a sign of Jubilee. For example, if it can point to a levelling of economic stratification in its own community, it can boldly proclaim the vision to others. There is, however, a certain vulnerability built into this approach. The failure of the church to mediate the vision with concrete examples from its own institutional life will also be visible to others. But the church must accept this vulnerability as the price of real dialogue with the larger society. If we point to the sins of the society, others can also point to the sins of the church. We must be open to this in our proclamation of Jubilee.

III. Specific examples from our own history

I want to look at four examples of ways in which the Jubilee theme has inspired and challenged the Mennonite church of which I am a part. I see limitations as well as strengths in these examples. Perhaps we can learn from these gestures of hope.

1) 1975 was declared the Year of Jubilee by the North American church body of which I am a part. It was the 450th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement, therefore the ninth Jubilee since the movement had its beginning. One of the emphases in that year was a call to return to our spiritual heritage in an analogous way in which the Jubilee called people to return to their inherited land. Attention to issues of "poverty and affluence" were made in the context of this spiritualization of the Jubilee. In retrospect, I see the poverty of that vision, so centred on the Mennonite church and its own spiritual heritage. And yet perhaps it was necessary for us Mennonites as we struggled with the label of being sectarian and as we began to move into mainstream political action. It became a time of empowerment for the church.

2) In 1982 MCC took up this theme in a special way. Robert Hull suggested the notion of "Sabbatical service" as a modern way of applying the Jubilee theme in our churches.[3] The focus was on ways of relating to the neighbours in our communities who were not Mennonites. The focus turned to the gifts and talents of the Mennonite people. We interpreted the Jubilee in such a way that it implied serving those around us freely, without cost to these neighbours. The suggestion was made that every seven years everyone between the ages of 21 and 63 serve the

[3] He based it on Deut: 15: 7-10. "If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community, in any of your towns within the land that the Lord is giving you, do no be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward your needy neighbour. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need whatever it may be."

wider society for a year of voluntary service. Congregations were invited to covenant with their members to support those on such service. Mutual aid and a levelling of economic status within the congregation would be the practical result. Part 2 of the proposal went beyond the congregation. It looked at the increasing militarization of society and the increasing affluence of Christians, including Mennonites. It suggested that Mennonites begin to contribute both to a peace tax fund as well as give voluntary labour to peace activities at regular times throughout their lives. It also called for a Christian Peace-making registration (instead of military registration). This would commit Mennonites to concrete actions both in economic terms and in service terms.

There is a more radical edge to this interpretation of Jubilee than the program in 1975. It does begin to challenge the powers that be, and to accept the risks that this would imply. Mennonites, however, have not flocked to this alternative, though there continue to be people who embody this vision in Voluntary service terms and in the Peace-maker teams that go to areas of violence to stand in solidarity with victims of war.

3) In 1992, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada established a Jubilee Fund as a way of recognizing 1992, not so much as the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in America, but as the year when Mennonites decided to make a covenant with Aboriginal people for a better 500 years in the future. The fund, to be used in providing scholarships for native students and to lease or purchase garden plots for urban aboriginal people, was to be a concrete way of expressing regrets for injustices of the past. Earlier hopes had been to fulfil outstanding Treaty Land Entitlements, by purchasing land, with a special focus in those areas where Mennonites have benefited directly from the Treaty process.

The fund did not grow as large as had been hoped for ($100,000). In addition, MCC was criticized for its apology. However, Mennonites had begun to recognize how interwoven they were in the larger systems of our society and had begun to take some responsible action, though only "gestures of hope." This created conflict within the church. At the same time, the process of decision-making included the people whom the decision would affect. Aboriginal people decided how the fund should be used. Moreover, the Mennonite theology of Jubilee was broadened as notions such as the "potlatch" entered our consciousness as another way of levelling the economic playing field.

4) I hope that 1998-2000 will be years of a renewed emphasis on Jubilee. A small group of a dozen or so people gathered two weeks ago in Toronto, on a Saturday, to talk about the global economic crises. Most of us were involved as individuals with Inter-church groups. Some were living in a communal household committed to sharing their economical means with each other. The discussion centred on our own failure as Mennonites to do economic analysis in our development work, on the inadequate "conflict theories" embraced in our theology (e.g., theories which do not encourage us to do a thorough class analysis), and on our own affluence, which makes us reluctant to tackle the large issues. We also asked why we had allowed our suspicions of others to keep us from partnering with those committed to the same goals. The group ended

the day by committing ourselves to continue working together to bring the Jubilee vision to our churches.

I hope these small "gestures of hope" will remind you of others like them in your own communities. As Mennonites, we hope to become partners with you, in proclaiming and living out the Jubilee vision. Hopefully, this discussion will inform and empower us on the way.

Lydia Neufeld Harder is Director of the Toronto Mennonite Theology Centre.

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12

The Challenge of the Next Millennium: A Call to Jubilee

David Pfrimmer

Will We Recognize the New World it When it Comes?

Recently, a reporter of the CBC was warning people about "Y2K"—the millennial quirk in many computers that will result in computer failures because they will not be able to recognize the year 2000. There is something terribly profound about all this—especially with the information age engulfing us at every turn these days—the inability to recognize the millennium when it comes.

Already, we are hearing the hype . . . just as for previous millennial transitions—we will no doubt witness everything from the quirky to the quaint as well as the apocalyptic to the arrogant. People are already booking their place to usher in the millennium.

As we approach the year 2000, no doubt there is will be the irresistible temptation by our corporate and political leaders to wax eloquent with a triumphalism about our human accomplishments, about how successful we have been, and the glittering economic and technological future that will be ours if we just seize it!

Sadly our own hubris and arrogance has resulted in a social amnesia among such euphoric optimists of human progress that causes us to forget;

- that every minute the nations of the world spend $1.8 million on armaments;
- every hour 1500 children die of hunger related diseases; every day another species becomes extinct; every week more people were detained, tortured, assassinated or made a refugee, or in some other way violated by acts of repressive regimes; that every month the world's economic system adds over $7.5 billion to the already unbearable burden of $1.5 trillion now burdening the poor people's of the world;
- that in Canada poverty among children has increased so that 1 in 5 children grows up poor in this rich land;
- that possible one out of every four of Canadians is unemployed or underemployed;
- that foodbanks are a growth industry in a country that prides itself on feeding the world;
- that young people face a very uncertain future;
- that increasingly families and communities are in distress.

Why is it that these issues—while on the minds of many average people—never seem to be raised? Why is it that our political leaders seem wholly incapable of addressing even in a token way any of these growing concerns? Why is it that there is such a acrimonious and bitter public mood?

In large part, I suspect it is because we approach the next millennium with leaders who have no vision of the world we want, no dreams of how we should live life together, no sense of security for our place in the community.

The New Economic Idolatry

What is most alarming to me is the degree to which our political leaders and most within the business community have been held intellectually and spiritually hostage to the new economic idolatry of globalization (the market will sort out our social choices and we have no choices to make) What is deeply troubling—for a person of faith particularly—is that 'globalization' is no longer merely about the dismal science of economics, but has assumed the status of the ultimate super-structure of making meaning of our world. It has assumed the status of religious dogma. It is what political economist James Laxer calls "The False God." A recent issue of the journal "Policy Options" (not a left-wing crunchy granola type of publication) raised a similar question in addressing the theme "Is Economics Still Relevant?"

One doesn't need to be a social scientist to realize that this 'new economic idolatry'—as happens with all idolatries—is failing. Not with out the tragic human, social and environmental costs I mentioned earlier. But it failing as evidenced by the rising tide of alienation in our communities. Lutheran theologian, Carl Braaten has said that today we in the develop nations face a crisis or meaning and those in the poorer nations face a crisis of misery. Both are inexorably linked to the crisis of vision facing those in positions of public leadership. And it may be ironic that we too — like the computers that fail to make the adjustment — will not recognize the next millennium as any different from the present, maybe even worse for the vast majority of the global human family.

What do Christians have to say to this reality? My brother this year sent me a birthday card. On the front was Moses standing on the shores of the Red Sea—arms out stretched with his staff — the seas had parted. But his head was turned toward the Hebrews. They were staring out at the pathway. And Moses with a look of incredulity says to them: "What do you mean it looks a bit muddy?"

The Challenge for the Church

As we face the Third Millennium, the pathway ahead for Christians will indeed be a "bit muddy" For if the challenge facing the world is one of vision, the challenge for the Christian community in the affluent parts of the world may be one of our identity as the community of God's people in the world. The identity crisis we face is not one of personal faith or piety. We shouldn't forget that in this century there have been more Christians martyred for their faith than in all the previous centuries combined. Nor should we forget that the church is growing dramatically throughout the poor regions of the world. The question is what is the public truth or public theology that the Church has to engage the world.

This is not a resurrection question (How do we come to salvation?) Rather it is a question of how seriously we take the incarnation. (For God so loved the world....John 3:16)

While we have many active congregations/parishes, the main challenge for the Canadian churches is that we seemingly do not have a public theology "...that speaks the truth to Caesar", to coin the phrase from Leslie Newbigin. The Churches faces a serious identity crisis in the "public square." Stephen Carter has described this as the "trivialization of religion." Carter writes,

> Religion..in the public square...it too often trivialised, treated as an unimportant facet of the human personality, one easily discarded, and one with which public-spirited individuals would not bother." (**The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion**, Anchor Books, 1994, p.xv.)

The churches have made an important public contribution to the development of Canada. From education to healthcare to social services to foreign policy, Canadian churches have played an important role. But at this particular juncture, the Canadian churches run the risk of sleep walking into the next Millennium, coopted to be acolytes of the economic status quo and mere chaplains of comfort to the victims of the economic currents sweeping away our sense of community and mutuality. And possibly even worse, becoming subservient to the "principalities and powers" of the state, the market and the countinghouse.

Recently, Martin Marty speaking at the Vancouver School of Theology described the churches today as like a team in the huddle. You know something significant is going on in there...you're not sure what it is .... all you see is their backsides! It is time for us to come out of the huddle. To speak a public truth to the idolatries of our times.

Some will say, isn't this public theology too political? It has political implications but its primary implication is fidelity to the sovereignty of God. It is interesting to observe the early church on this matter. While it is true that the early church never set out to establish a political order and it did acknowledge the authority of Caesar, the peculiar question that remains is, "Why was the early church so persecuted? More specifically, why did the early church not accept the protection of the imperial government of Rome when there were literally hundreds of privatized religious organizations in the eastern Mediterranean that enjoyed just such protection?

The reason was simple. If the church was to be true to the Gospel, it could not accept be relegated to the status of a private inwardly focussed religion subservient to the principalities and powers of the world. The Church had to be the bearer of God's intention to all the nations. In Matthew 35, the account of the final judgement, Matthew makes this point in writing,

> When the Son of Man comes in glory, all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of glory. All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats...(35:31-46)

As Leslie Newbigin points out, Christians can never seek refuge in a ghetto where faith is not proclaimed as public truth...Christians cannot agree on one law for themselves and one law for the world.

If we take seriously the incarnation—that God became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. (John 1)—our piety demands a public not a private faith the seriously engages the world. More specifically, it means Christians cannot accept that there are some areas of life—society, the economy, politics, the environment—that are beyond the jurisdictions of God's intentions. To do so is to deny the incarnation of Christ and to limit God providential love for all people. Such an understanding however places us on a collision course with whatever idolatry is fashionable or makes ultimate claims upon our communities.

A New Beginning — The Call to Jubilee

The biblical concept of Jubilee as recorded in Leviticus 25 was celebrated once every fifty years. It was known as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths" It required that the land lie fallow, the all debts be forgiven, that captives be set free, and that a celebration be held. The Jubilee began on the day of atonement with an acknowledgement of how the people had failed in their relationships to God and to the Covenant. Jubilee was an opportunity to restore, re-create, and renew the Divine balance within human relationships and with creation. It is not surprising that Jesus also stood within this tradition in "announcing the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18-19).

The idea of Jubilee may provide a starting point for a public theology for the Canadian churches. As people look for an alternative social vision, Jubilee may offer a vision for these turbulent times when globalization seems to offer only an economics of increasing despair. It may be a means to incarnate the Gospel as public truth to those facing the crisis of meaning and as a word of hope to those caught in the crisis of misery. It may serve offer a social hermeneutic by which the churches can united to engage the world.

Many churches have called for a special observances. His Holiness John Paul II has called for a three year observance to prepare for the Great Jubilee. The Canadian churches have joined with partner churches around the world in what has come to be called the Jubilee Initiative.

The three themes for this initiative are:

- release from bondage — which will focus on debt slavery and the enslavement of workers
- redistribution or the restoration of wealth — which will focus on the disparities in wealth and those ways in which wealth has been taken
- renewal of the earth — which will focus on preserving the environment

Jubilee is indeed about how God is at work in history. It is about Justice — What Walter Brueggemann describes as "...finding out what belongs to whom and then giving it back!" But it is also as Maria Harris — a Professor of religious education in New York who has written extensively about the Hebrew and Christian understandings of Jubilee— points out, it is "a way of being in the world."

Challenges for the Churches

It is here that Jubilee might offer us as the Church the basis of a public theology that will help us resolve our collective identity crisis in the public square—A Way of being in the World! It stands in blatant contradiction to the failing idolatry of globalization and the individualism and possessive consumerism it offers people. It summons us to a more nobler vision for our communities and for how we conduct our own lives. It calls for an "economics of giving" not and "economics of getting" (e.g. Lester Thurow, a note MIT Economics, has called for an economics of sacrifice). Jubilee is indeed non-partisanly political but it is far broader than just political. In short it appeals to that essential "original goodness" within people and offers a word of hope for the restoration and re-creation of our communities.

In forging this renewed public identity, the churches themselves have some challenges to face. There are indeed many but I'll mention a few.

Firstly, we need to develop a appropriate public humility. Doug Hall and others have written extensively about the disestablishment of the church. We no longer have instant credibility, we need to earn the credibility of the public. This is not necessarily bad. It may be our greatest asset. Our task is not to provide prefabricated answers, but to engage in the public dialogue to ensure we are addressing the right questions—those that focus on people!

Secondly, as churches we need to reclaim our prophetic edge. Reginald Bibby in speaking at Challenge for Change said, If the church is merely telling the world what it wants to hear, so what? Dan Macquire, a Roman Catholic theologian, has said that the Jewish and Christian communities in recent time have cauterized their prophetic nerve. We should not forget, that when others were doubtful, we were right on opposing apartheid, we were right to oppose the illegal occupation of Namibia, we were right in denouncing the human rights violations in Central America, and even more recently we have been right to oppose the expansion of government gambling, even in the face of the obscene and scandalous acrobatics of the spin doctors at Queen's Park to convince the sceptical public otherwise.

Thirdly, we must be informed and have an analysis. You well remember Karl Barth's famous line that preachers must have the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other when they are preaching. Churches need to be communities for moral and ethical deliberation. Places that help people understand and reflect on issues in the face of the political and corporate propaganda that bombards and distorts our perspectives. This must include theological and bible study as well as social analysis.

Fourthly, the churches will need to be more radically ecumenical as well as multi- faith in our approach. (I will leave the multifaith dimension for another time) The new ecumenicism will mean developing relationships that recognize there may be fundamental theological differences, but these will not be impediments to our worshipping, praying and working together for justice for our neighbours. More specifically, this means developing a new accommodation between so-called liberal and conservative Christians.

Last year, the Lutherans and Reformed churches in the US concluded an agreement—**A Common Calling**. What was interesting about this ecumenical formula was that it included not just mutual affirmations but also mutual admonitions that pointed out how the tension of our theological differences can serve to bring out the best of our own traditions.

Lastly, we need to reclaim as Church our sense of vocation for the world. This may be on the doorstep of your congregation (as Lyle Schaller argues today) but it also can be in the far flung corners of the world with neighbours we do not yet know. But the Church should make a difference in the neighbourhood, in the town or city, in the national community or in the world where it finds itself. This is not just an ethical or moral responsibility, but it is an evangelical opportunity. Lest I leave you with the idea that I am cynically pessimistic about the future, I want to assure you that I remain optimistic and hopeful about the public opportunities. Though many people are sceptical today about the institutional church — they are very interested in the message. The Church can meet the challenge to proclaim the Gospel as public truth in a way that offers meaning and purpose to those who are floundering and hope to those who are suffering.

St. Augustine has said, "Hope has two lovely sisters, anger and courage. Anger so that what must not be will not be. Courage so that what must be, shall be."

May God fill us with just such hope for the next Millenium. Thank you!

David Pfrimmer is Director of the Lutheran Office for Public Policy located at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Ontario. and the Chair of the Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches.

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13

Jubilee: The Year Of Restoration—To Debtors, the Poor, and to the Earth

Jim Kirkwood

Jesus is the restorer and the time for restoration is now

1. The origin and purpose of the Jubilee in Hebrew history .

In slavery in Egypt the Jewish dream, and desire was for a land of their own that God had promised to their ancestor Abraham. In much the same way as some of our ancestors in the 19th century, living in virtual slavery to large landowners, and experiencing the Irish potato famine and poverty in Europe, saw North America as a promised land.

Through Moses' leadership, the Hebrews fled Egypt, crossed a great wilderness, and entered the land of Canaan (known today as Israel and Jordan and the west bank and Gaza). (You get to know someone well if you go for a long 40 year walk).

As they travelled they established enlarging communities - 12 - each with a leader called a judge and section leaders. They built communities, even the beginnings of a nation as they wandered and suffered together in the wilderness. But as they came to enter Canaan and settle down their life was going to change from being nomads and wanderers to become farmers and stock-keepers and land owners and business people. And so, some 1,200 years or more before Jesus time, a wise prophet had the vision, recorded by the writer of Leviticus 25. A vision of a year of restoration, as a way of maintaining some of the community spirit and relative equality which had been built up in hardship and wanderings through the desert. Like the early pioneers in rural Canada the Hebrews knew they would have to stick together, and help each other.

They would have to fight together to overcome the local Canaanites. (Of course we would reject the idea that invading a country and killing and driving out the inhabitants could be a plan from God, but that is another sermon!)

This prophet saw, through foresight or hindsight, that occupancy of land would be a matter of great competition, almost life or death; that the large family with strong sons would gradually acquire the land of a weaker family, perhaps with few children; that those weaker ones would end up working for the others on the land they used to own. That some would acquire wealth through trading and good luck and management, and others would become debt-slaves as they borrowed to try to survive. In fact all of this happened and led to extreme wealth and disparity that grew up with the rise of the kingship and priesthood. This included the incredible taxation of the people and lavish spending, and the looting of conquered peoples that it took to support the building of the city of jerusalem and especially the temple under the kings saul and david and solomon.

This might explain some of Samuel's original reluctance to appoint a king and establish powerful institutions like the kingship and the priesthood. The theology, the reasoning behind the prophet's vision was clear: God was saying "I have freed you from slavery in Egypt; I led you through the wilderness, and built you into a community and you must look after each other and become a people."

The vision came with some specific and astonishing guidelines ;

- if your Jewish neighbour becomes a slave you can still have one year to buy him or her back;
- don't charge interest on money you lend;
- don't make profit on the food you sell him or her;
- don't work the land too hard; it also belongs to God; it too needs a rest. Let it lie fallow every 7 years;
- even the land, the earth is part of my family too.

So the dream of the year of restoration was established. The year would be announced by the blowing of a ram's horn throughout the land, the word 'jubilee' comes from the Hebrew word for ram's horn. As the 7th day was special and no one worked whether owner, slave or beast; so the 7x7 = 49th year would be a special equalizing year.

If you had had to sell your land to pay your debts, you or your family got it back if they had not been able to buy it back. If you had debts they were forgiven. If your children or parents themselves had been sold as slaves they were freed without payment.

Of course this restoration would not last forever; there are differences in human need, and human greed. The jubilee process would have to be repeated every 50 years, every generation, just as the sabbath has to be repeated every 7 days. This was not a common sense revolution! It wouldn't make economic sense to Mike Harris or Conrad Black. It doesn't line up well with the two cornerstones of our economic system—private property and usury, the lending of money at interest, principles that are great for the strong, those that have capital and property, and oppressive to the weak, those that have neither.

2. Jesus announces the Jubilee

Jesus himself announced the year of jubilee as recorded in Luke 4. One Sabbath, his first in his home village of Nazareth since he began his mission, he read a controversial section from scripture from isaiah. Isaiah speaks about people who normally get left out: blind, deaf, prisoners, lame, and the poor.

He added that these great changes predicted by Isaiah are starting to come true through him!!! starting now. This is the year, the jubilee the acceptable year of our Lord; God's year of restoration of property or freedom to those who had lost it or been deprived of it. People were happy to know that jesus enabled the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk; they may have even hoped that some of their relatives might get free from the prisons of the hated roman governors.

But they were especially happy to hear that there would be good news for the poor. Many of his listeners were poor; there were not too many wealthy and powerful living in the village of Nazareth.

They might recover a family plot in the countryside that had been lost to money lenders, escape a debt they could never repay, or even recover a child they had `lent' to a big landowner until they could repay an unpayable debt.

There was a stinger in the tail.

These good things are not just for you, you will be sharing them with other tribes and peoples. They are not just for Hebrews!! God is father of the whole world, and you are not so special as you may think. You are not the only chosen people. God cares as much for other peoples as for you; more if they are needy, like the widow in Sidon in the time of Elijah, or Namaan the Syrian leper.

This was now a scandal; this threatened their identity as the chosen people. They would have to share status and benefits with so many other peoples. So they wanted to throw him over a cliff! But they didn't - perhaps they sensed the authority of his message - the voice of God coming through.

3. Today's scandal

It is a scandal today in the economic world to suggest that all the world's resources be used to meet the needs of all the world's people! People are measured not by needs but by the resources they control or the purchasing power they have.

The economic powers-that-be prefer to distribute wealth and resources through the marketplace, where they the economically powerful have an advantage, for all their talk about a level playing field! And this marketplace must not be interfered with (so they say). We must accept it trust it even, for the far right, worship it. What we might call systems of distributive justice, they would call a scandal, threatening our very way of life!

But the real scandal is the great disparity, ever -widening, among God's children who are rich and those who are poor. Between the have- nots and the have-lots. The standard of living most of us have in this affluent society is not for us alone; its for each and every one of God's children. Not just for the strong, the wealthy , the already privileged.

You and I may feel we live very much at the edge of wealth in comparison to Conrad Black or the Reichmanns, the Bronfmans, or even the Eatons, but we seem wealthy to those without the security of knowing whether tomorrow will bring a meal or not.

I think of an example. While travelling by bus in Tanzania a saw a boy , about 16 years old, in the market in the town of Singida. He had the signs of severe mental disability. I was told that he slept at the market, ate food from the rubbish bins and begged from travellers and the market - women, who did their best to look after him. I couldn't help comparing him with our own son of about the same age, who had access to excellent resources for appropriate education and support.

We do seem wealthy to the homeless of Toronto or Calcutta, or landless farmers living in the slums of Brazil. These, the deprived of the earth, are our family. We are linked to them through

global institutions; through savings in banks, shares in companies, governments we elect; through the International Monetary Fund which is a lending and collection agency which we created.

We are not more fortunate, it was organized this way by the rich and powerful, and we do benefit. If we don't actually sin personally in this exploitation. It is these institutions which do our sinning for us.!!!!! And they must repent and be converted to serve the needs of all; people created them and people can change them and make them serve God's purposes.

There is a stinger in the tail for us too.

Our identity is threatened by the concept of equal just sharing. Our standard of living is not bestowed on us by fortune and certainly not by God. We are not better off because we are Christian. This theology, while common, is not from God , but to comfort and justify the affluent.

Let's focus on a very large group of the deprived. Some 1 billion people around the world cannot get free of debt sufficiently to have the basics of life, because they live in one out of 40 or so of the most highly indebted poor countries. Such countries as Lesotho, Tanzania, Rwanda, Mozambique, Malawi, Bangladesh. This means that they are virtual slaves to their national debt, which all agree can never be paid. It is mostly women and children who suffer the most.

If we run into unmanageable debt, we who know about capitalism can declare bankruptcy; true we have to give up most of our assets but we are left with enough to live on and a chance to start again. The poor in most countries can't , and their governments can't declare bankruptcy. They are forced to sell everything, a process the IMF calls by the fancy name of 'privatization'.

But even after that they can't be forgiven their debt, even if they have paid in interest the value of the loan 2 or 3 times over. The principal, though unpayable, remains and they must keep paying. Why try to pay a debt that you can never hope to pay? So hope, and often integrity, slip away from governments who are in any case more beholden to the lenders than to their own people.

Yet their citizens continue paying through their taxes and/or cuts in health and education services. In many cases these services are non-existent, their government can't or won't provide them. These people need a new beginning, a chance to start afresh, the spirit of jubilee.

4. Can we make the year 2,000 a year of restoration for them????

We approach the celebration of the millennium, 2000 years since jesus appearance on this planet; a Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative has been started by national churches and coalitions. The 32 page vision statement, available from every national church office, is full of sparks to get you going. It has many quotes, and action suggestions. There is much to choose from, but it needs your ideas and your participation.

The statement,called "A New Beginning: A Call for Jubilee," points out 3 areas of restoration needed in our world:

1. Restoration of hope and a new beginning to those bound by unpayable debt

1. Restoration of hope and a new beginning to those bound by unpayable debt

2. Restoration of community between rich and poor, and

3. Restoration of the earth and the environment to a healthy state.

In the first stage, we are emphasizing the area of hope for debtor nations. Martin Luther King had a dream; that black and white would live together in peace as equals. Our jubilee dream is a harder one; that rich and poor would live together in such a way that no one would have too much and no-one would have too little; in short that everyone would have enough.

Our immediate goal is to have IMF declare relief on nearly all debt of the most indebted countries, on condition that they and we make changes so that these unpayable loans won't happen again. The world wide objective for this global campaign is to have 6 million signatures to present to the leaders of the G-8 countries, including Canada, at their next meeting in April 1999 in Cologne Germany.

Please sign up or take one a get others in your family or group to sign. Lets get 6 million signatures to free a billion slaves.

All churches - Protestant and Catholic will have jubilee as a study and action project from now to the year 2000. An impressive coordination is building up around the world using the internet and other means. Some African churches are working hard already. A brochure is available -it has excellent answers to some very hard questions about how and why to forgive debt.

There is another stinger in the tail; that's the cost. We will have to pay; the IMF will have to write off or greatly reduce loans and the IMF is us. We will pay one way or another, whether through taxes or bank charges. It will be worth it if a billion people have a small chance where currently they see none.

God grieves the gross inequalities among God's children in the human family. Lets work with God , the grieving parent, to bring in a new spirit and reality of equality and fairness among all the children of the earth.

Lets have a new beginning ; lets call for jubilee . . .the acceptable year of the lord, the year of God's grace and favour. God's children can be freed from poverty, and from soul-destroying wealth.

Praise be to the God of new beginnings.

Jim Kirkwood represents the Canadian Churches Forum for Global Ministries and lends energy to the Inter-Church Coalition on Africa.

14
Life-giving Sabbath

Paula Butler

The scripture readings today ask us to think about the meaning of Sabbath. In the passage from Luke, two different understandings of Sabbath conflict with each other. Jesus' understanding of sabbath seemed radically different from that of the leaders of the synagogue. As I thought about Sabbath in preparation for this morning's reflection, I became more and more aware of what seems to be a deep tension or contradiction in the notion of Sabbath. This is the tension between, on one hand, the call to rest in God, to cease our labours in order to be renewed and re-grounded in our relationship with God, and on the other hand, the call to act in the world in ways that bring life and liberation to people. What do we do with this tension, with this seeming contradiction? Many of us long for a quiet space in our lives for rest and spiritual rejuvenation, some place away from newspapers and telephones and email. And yet in Luke we meet Jesus claiming the Sabbath as an appropriate time to take action for the healing of the world.

I also want to say at the outset that I am very aware of the fact that how we think about Sabbath - about the meaning of rest or re-creation/recreation and the meaning of work - depends a great deal on what our own context and situation is. Among those of us gathered here this morning are many different life-situations, and therefore each of us faces a different challenge or different issues in relation to keeping the Sabbath holy. A person unable to find paid employment may experience Sabbath differently from an employed person. A person whose primary occupation is as a homemaker, whose duties run 7 days a week, comes to these questions differently from someone whose life is divided more clearly between hours of work and hours of leisure. To a large degree, there is still a gender difference in terms of people's experiences of work and rest. What does Sabbath mean to a female peasant farmer in Zambia or Nigeria, or to a teenage street kid in Brazil? As we think about what it means for us to "keep the Sabbath holy", we need to both resist a generic approach, and also to maintain a sense of our connectedness to all people whose experiences of the right to work or the right to Sabbath rest may be quite different from our own.

I'd like to give two illustrations. Some years ago, I spent several weeks in Kinshasa, in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. I stayed with a family who lived on the campus of a university owned and operated by the Protestant Church of Congo. Congo has a very high rate of unemployment in the formal sector. The husband was a professor of theology, so he taught several courses at the university, and he was also one of the deans, so he had a very heavy administrative load as well. He was an ordained Presbyterian pastor, and because there were not enough ordained pastors for all the parishes, he had been assigned to one of the largest congregations in the city, with all the duties that go along with that. For instance, while I was there, he was leading a series of weekly advent Bible studies and organizing a youth retreat. As well, he was the moderator of the presbytery, which meant that he had a great many church meetings to attend at the presbytery level, and was also expected to give communion at all the parishes in the presbytery. Meanwhile, as the head of a large extended family, and one of its few salaried members, he also had many family-related duties. For instance, while I was there I went

with him to visit a sister of his who was quite ill and depended on him for pastoral care and to purchase the medication she needed. The whole time I stayed with this family, it seemed that this man was constantly running from one duty to the next, and was actually doing the equivalent of 3 or 4 full-time jobs. One of the reasons for this was the extremely limited financial means of the church there to employ more people. But he also was a deeply committed Christian, who felt called to the work he was doing.

Despite the very hard work this man did, he was paid well under $200/month. His wife also worked very hard both running the household - they had 4 children of their own plus 4 other relatives who stayed with them - and also trying to bring in some additional cash. She rose every morning at 3:30 am to bake small loaves of bread which she sold to the students at the university, along with tea, for their morning meal. When this activity ended around 9:30 or 10:00 in the morning, she then went on with all the other chores for the day. She was also very active in the church women's group in her congregation and on national committees, and had recently been involved in a big drive to gather clothing to send to Congolese who had become refugees in the eastern part of the country because of conflict. Like her husband, her work never seemed to end, and it was a combination of work to make ends meet, and work responding to the needs of others.

I mention the situation of this family because I think it is important to ask ourselves why some people work very hard but are not adequately paid for their work, why some people never get any time off, why the economies in so many countries depend on a handful of people working flat out trying to care for the needs of others, and huge numbers of people with no opportunity for meaningful work. Meaningful Sabbath requires the opportunity for meaningful work.

The second story I would like to relate is something I found in a collection of articles about tourism written by people who live in tourist-destination countries. I was quite surprised to discover many references in these articles to the meaning of Sabbath in relation to tourism. From their perspective, Sabbath was often wrongly reduced to the right to leisure time, and to vacations, enjoyed mostly by affluent people in other countries. This is a story from Sri Lanka, written by a Catholic priest:

> About ten years ago I was working among fishermen, farmers and other rural people in Balapitiya situated just 50 miles south of Colombo. There I met a twelve-year old village lad, Sunil de Mel, who came to help his father colour-wash the little church in which I lived. Everybody who knew Sunil called him "Mal". I befriended Mal and discovered that he was the eldest in a poor family of five children. He had only one shirt and one pair of shorts which had seen better days. He gave up schooling in order to help his father, a casual worker, in various odd jobs. In the course of conversation, I was amazed to learn that Mal had never been to Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital city. So on my next trip to Colombo, I took Mal on my scooter on a sight-seeing tour of the metropolis. The tall buildings, crowded streets, traffic jams, numerous shops, the ride on an escalator, ice cream on the top floor of a fourteen story building, Houses of Parliament and Museum - all the varied sights and sounds combined to make it for him an unforgettable experience. Mal was a "tourist" and I was his tour guide.
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> On our way back, we stopped at the Bentota Tourist Resort and watched the foreign children enjoying themselves in the sea and on the golden beach. Here was Mal, my little "tourist" after his memorable

> tour of Colombo, and there were the foreign children who had traveled thousands of miles with their parents to enjoy a glorious holiday in a posh hotel at Bentota. Here was a striking study in contrasts - symbols of two "worlds" that inhabit one. This incident, etched deeply in my memory, raised many questions. Why is it that Mal never had an opportunity of visiting Colombo just 50 miles away while foreign children are able to visit countries 5000 miles away? How is it that the parents of these children are able to pay for one day's hotel accommodation, an amount more than the combined earnings of Mal and his father for one month? Why does Mal have only one set of clothes while those tourist children have more than they could use? Why does Mal look so frail and stunted in comparison to those big-made, robust children of his own age? Why does God's image shine so radiantly in the faces of those foreign children while the same image seems blurred and tarnished in Mal's malnourished face? Why, at such an early age, did Mal have to leave school and join the ranks of the working class who live from day to day, and to whom leisure and paid holidays are an unknown luxury? (Fr. Dr. Derrick Mendis, "Theological Reflections on Tourism")

Let us keep before us this awareness of the contemporary global experiences of work and leisure, but turn now for a few minutes to look at the Biblical tradition of Sabbath. As Sabbath became institutionalized in Jewish tradition, it seems that its earliest meaning and purpose became obscured. By Jesus' time, the Sabbath had become entrenched in legalities; there was a whole set of rules about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. For me as a child, I was always intrigued by the fact that my Cape Breton grandparents, who loved playing the card game "tarbish", had a strict prohibition on card-playing on Sundays. My own parents claimed Sunday as a "family day", when we spent time together as a nuclear family rather than doing any other extra-curricular activities. Many of us will still remember a time when stores were not open on Sundays, but our children will have no memory of that. A Tanzanian friend of mine to whom I spoke recently talked about how they had been taught by missionaries that they must not fetch firewood, work in the garden or pound maize on Sundays.

Some of us may have grown up with these kinds of rules about the Sabbath, and we may feel some sense of loss as these traditions have disappeared, or we may feel that the Sabbath has been liberated from rules and restrictions that no longer had meaning for us. In today's secularized world, we may experience a lot of ambiguity about the meaning of Sabbath, making us wonder if there is anything more to "keeping the Sabbath holy" than coming to church Sunday morning, and indeed, sometimes wondering even whether we need to bother with church! (Especially in the summer!)

Given this ambiguity and these changes in how the Sabbath is kept, it's worthwhile to poke about in the Old Testament to discern the original intention of the Sabbath. Let me whip through a few!

Genesis: God rested on the seventh day after six days of labouring to create the world. This way of telling the story of creation came out of a tradition in which seven was considered a perfect number, but also out of a tradition which had discovered the wisdom of a regular, periodic time of rest and renewal. There is a deep wisdom here about what creation - not just humanity, but all of creation - needs in order to be nourished and sustained. The practice of a fallow time for the earth was part of this. There is also here the notion of celebration and of play, of delight in life and wonder at creation. Sabbath is a time when we can cease from doing and simply be. We are not "human resources" or "human capital", we are not a labour market,

we are not commodities. We are part of God's creation; that's what gives us value. And that is cause for celebration, for healing rest and laughter. In the scripture reading from Luke, after Jesus healed the bent-over woman, the text says: "the entire crowd rejoiced at all the wonderful things he was doing". They rejoiced!

A poem by Rubem Alves gathers up these ideas:

> And suddenly God's eyes changed -
> gone was the seriousness of the worker.
> They were the eyes of a child -
> sheer delight before the beauty of Paradise.
> And there was a change in God's body -
> gone were the tense muscles of the worker.
> It was the body of a child -
> a winged body -
> butterfly -
> playful.
> The universe was at play with God -
> and it was Sabbath.

Then we have Exodus: the story of the Israelites receiving manna for sustenance during their wanderings in the desert. What does that story have to do with Sabbath, you may be wondering. The Israelites were given very precise instructions about when and how much manna to gather. They were not to hoard it; they were not to gather more than they needed, nor less than they needed; they were not to gather any on the seventh day; rather, they were to trust that enough would be provided on the sixth day to carry them through the seventh day. This whole story is rich in what it teaches about fair distribution of the resources needed to sustain life. It's about an economy of enough, an economy which limits unnecessary and unreasonable accumulation, and also aimed at preventing concentrations of resources. For me, this was an "aha" moment in my understanding of Sabbath: the idea that Sabbath is not just about what you do or don't do on Sunday, but is about a whole style of life and about how human society organizes itself to ensure fair distribution of the resources needed to sustain life for everyone and all creation. Then we come to Leviticus, in particular Chapter 25, where there are instructions about how to keep the Sabbath year. "When you enter the land I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall sow your vineyard, and gather in their yield, but in the seventh year there shall be a complete rest for the land." This chapter of Leviticus goes on to speak of the Jubilee year, and of the mechanisms that are to be put in place to restore justice to society when some members - perhaps many members - have become impoverished, indebted and enslaved. In the Sabbath year, the unharvested fruits of the earth - whatever the land produces of its own accord in that year - are to be made available to all people, inclusive of the poor and dispossessed. The earth and human

community are to be offered a new lease on life. Once again, we have Sabbath presented as not only a time of rest and renewal, but as an opportunity for human society to be re-organized in such as a way as to offer justice and human rights to all people.

So we come to the command in Deuteronomy 5 - the fourth of the 10 Commandments - "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you." The notion of Sabbath already has many layers of meaning: a time for rest, for celebration, for renewal and a time to restore justice to human society. The fourth commandment is also very explicit about the fact that Sabbath crosses all barriers and categories of social class, gender and race. Everyone - sons and daughters, slaves, resident aliens - are entitled to rest on the seventh day. Then another element appears. The Israelites are told that they must keep the Sabbath holy in remembrance of the fact that they themselves experienced slavery in Egypt and were freed from their oppression by God. The weekly Sabbath day compelled them to remember that their God is a God who opposes all forms of slavery and exploitation, and who acted in history to liberate the Israelites. We can infer that Sabbath calls us to take the same stance.

In the light of this very rich Sabbath tradition, Jesus' action in the story in Luke does not seem like such a radical departure at all. He acts very much in the tradition of Sabbath as life-giving and restorative. Another way of thinking about this tradition is that it was centred on the needs of the most vulnerable. Many of the practices related to Sabbath were designed to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable in the society were met. In the story in Luke, there is a woman who has been suffering for 18 years, who has heard of Jesus' healing powers, and makes her way to the synagogue because she has heard he is there. Jesus responds from his heart. He responds to her suffering and her longing for healing. He responds to her personhood. And he chooses to disregard the institutional rules about what kind of activity is or is not allowed by the religious leaders on the Sabbath. His action is not only healing for the bent-over woman. It is also a liberating message for all the people gathered there; the way they rejoice at his response to the leaders of the synagogue tells us a lot. It tells us that they have felt dehumanized by the legalism which has crept into the Jewish faith, and dehumanized by the classism that has crept into their community. Jesus' action proclaims to all those present a new, more life-giving way of living together in community.

What is there, then, in all this, which is useful or helpful to us?

What does it mean for us to keep the Sabbath holy?

There are a couple of things that seemed most important to me. Most simple, but most profound, was the insight that keeping the Sabbath holy means honouring God's creation by acting in favour of life, by which I mean in favour of the wellbeing and dignity of all people, the rights of all people, which means actively caring for people - "visiting the sick", as my Tanzanian friend put it - and political action for justice and against injustice. This is a fundamental aspect of trying to model ourselves after Christ.

To quote from a document published by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, "In today's world, with its culture of acquisitiveness and exploitation, to do justice and to remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy, are acts of resistance. They are counter-cultural."

If all people have the right to a Sabbath rest, then all people correspondingly have the right to work and to just remuneration for their work. A Sabbath lifestyle - a Christian lifestyle - needs to address the realities of a world in which far too many have no opportunity for meaningful work, and far too many people must work long hours every day for bare survival, or must do work in inhumane conditions little different from slavery. This "act of resistance" needs to include resistance to the underlying value systems which create and perpetuate these realities. We need to re-examine the deep influence that the values of capitalism, consumerism and materialism have on us. Can the Sabbath be a day in which we consciously resist these values? And what would it mean to resist them? Is there anything we might do differently? What would it mean to confront our deep concern about ensuring our own future security - especially our financial security - in light of the instructions to the Israelites in the desert not to save up extra manna but rather to receive and equitably distribute each day's manna for each day's nourishment?

Let me come back again to the tension or contradiction I mentioned at the beginning, because it keeps resurfacing for me. In our modern industrial society, in this culture which emphasizes individualism, we hear a lot about our need and our right even, to nurture ourselves, to take time for ourselves, so that on one level we may not appreciate Jesus' act of compassion for the bent-over woman, because it suggests that her wellbeing meant more to Jesus than his own need to rest from labour. So the tension is not just between work and rest, but between time spent caring for ourselves and time spent caring for others. Many people in ministries of service to others "burn out" from the gargantuan effort of trying to respond to the enormous needs they encounter. These people are also bent-over from the burdens they shoulder. They too need Jesus' healing touch, need space for renewal and rest. The tension is perhaps not something that we can resolve or need to resolve; rather each of us needs to live with it and sort out what balance, what kind of allocation of time, seems faithful.

This is the Sabbath; we come together here to worship, to be in fellowship with one another, to remember the Gospel, to praise God, to hear God's word for us, to be still, to be restored, renewed, strengthened, loved. In Jesus' compassionate act of healing, he offers each one of us new life, and offers the world new life.

Let us now take several minutes of silence to rest in God's healing love.

Paula Butler is Global Education/Development Secretary for the Division of World Outreach at the United Church of Canada

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The Beatitudes and Jubilee

Richard Renshaw csc

Today, in these last months of preparation to celebrate the Jubilee Year 2000, and in the Year of the Holy Spirit, we announce the Beatitudes from Luke's gospel. This is a fundamental text for understanding the Gospel. In our context it provides an opportunity to talk about poverty in God's Reign and in the Jubilee.

The gap between rich and poor across the world is widening. Enormously. Incredibly. Even here in Canada. Many Christian Churches have made a major effort to be sensitive to that reality and to encourage sensitivity among its members. The Beatitudes can at least encourage us to push ahead. They are criteria for the Reign of God. Like much of the Gospel they get interpreted very differently by rich people and by poor people. Frequently, but not always, the rich want to spiritualize it. Sometimes the poor forget the spiritual dimensions. Sometimes there is a beautiful recognition of its meaning by both rich and poor. These moments are particularly encouraging signs of God's Reign among us. They are the seeds that can make the Jubilee Year a reality.

Did you ever notice that the first Beatitude says it all? The others help explore its dimensions but add nothing substantially new. The poor here are those who are materially deprived, without security, without power. Nevertheless, those who are not materially deprived can be part of the beatitudes by being in touch with the lives of those who are, especially by their solidarity.

There is a connection, I believe between Luke 4 and Luke 6:

In Luke 4 Jesus cites Isaiah (Obviously one of Jesus' favourite writers!):

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has annointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

This is a revelation of God: gratuitous in love and generous in gifts. Jesus announces the "Year of God's favour" when the enslaved are set free, debts are forgiven and land is given a rest. It is a call to the Jubilee Sabbath as found in Leviticus 25.

You will declare this fiftieth year sacred and proclaim the liberation of all the inhabitants of the land. This is to be the jubilee for you....

So, after leaving the Synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus gives concrete signs of this Jubilee by casting out demons and curing the sick, lepers and paralytics, as well as challenging the way the Pharisees observe the Sabbath, in Luke 6 Jesus offers four blessings and four curses: a call to conversion. Depending on how you have shaped your life you are either blessed or cursed. There also appears to be a parallel in Luke with Leviticus where the announcement of the Jubilee in chapter 25 is followed by the Blessings/Curses of chapter 26.

The Beatitudes are universal in character. They express the demand of the Gospel. We are either poor, hungry, weep and are persecuted or we are outside the Reign of God.

When we celebrate Eucharist, the table of the poor, we accept to come poor, hungry, mourning, persecuted and in solidarity with all those who suffer in these ways. The meal is not sumptuous. It is a meal by and for the poor.

If we are to live by the Beatitudes, we have an enormous task before us. It is fundamentally a task of evangelization, and our highly secularized and our society needs evangelization. However, it will be evangelized only if all of us become evangelizers, if we become people of the Beatitudes.

Richard Renshaw is Assistant General Secretary of the Canadian Religious Conference.